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**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MARRIAGE:
REGIONAL AND CROSS-REGIONAL BRIDES IN
RURAL NORTH INDIA**

Shruti Chaudhry

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DECLARATION

This thesis has been composed by me and is my own work. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Shruti Chaudhry

19 July 2016

ABSTRACT

Based on eleven months of ethnographic fieldwork (September 2012-August 2013) in a village in Baghpat district located in the western part of the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the thesis compares the lived experiences of marriage of women in what I describe as regional marriage (RM) with women in cross-regional marriage (CRM). RMs are marriages that conform to caste and community norms (caste endogamy, *gotrā* [clan] and village/territorial exogamy) and are negotiated within a limited geographical region, i.e., the state. CRMs are those between men in north India and women from the southern, eastern and north-eastern parts of the country. Such marriages cross caste, linguistic and state boundaries with the marriage distance exceeding 1000 kms. CRMs also differ from RMs with regard to their modes of arrangement and the payments involved. They result from two sets of factors – one operating at bride-sending regions (mainly poverty) and the other at bride-receiving regions (masculine sex ratios and the difficulties some men have in achieving “eligibility” for marriage). NGO and journalistic accounts and some academic work has focused on CRMs: being a consequence only of masculine sex ratios and bride shortages; deviating from north Indian marriage norms; involving the “sale” and “purchase” of poor women from poor districts and states; and CRBs’ low status and lack of agency in receiving communities.

This research aims to interrogate the moral panic surrounding the “plight” of CRBs. The thesis begins by contextualising CRM by exploring the factors that lead some (UP) men of particular castes to seek brides from other states and those that influence the migration of women over long-distances for marriages. It examines the process of negotiation entailed in making a RM and a CRM – the role of matchmakers, marriage payments and the rituals regarded as necessary to make a marriage “legitimate”. The thesis then focuses on the question of lived experiences of marriage by examining different aspects of regional brides’ (RB) and cross-regional brides’ (CRB) everyday lives – what the process of adjustment in a new (marital) home means for women when they leave their natal homes to live in their husbands’ homes and villages, the work that married women do, their relationships with other women in their marital villages, their relationships with their husbands and with their natal kin. Married

women's lives are embedded in various power dynamics and this research aims to address how factors such as caste, class, religion and age/years of marriage shape women's post-marital experiences, in addition to their regional origins. This ethnographic study also attempts to outline issues specific to CRBs, particularly discrimination, belonging and incorporation within a culturally and linguistically different context, as well as the intergenerational implications of these marriages in terms of the (caste) status, rights and marriages of children of cross-regional couples. This research departs from existing studies on CRM as it attempts to understand post-marital experiences through a comparison with RM. Such an approach makes it possible to recognise similarities in the lived experiences of RBs and CRBs that enables a more nuanced understanding of the gendering of intimate/marital relationships in contemporary rural India within a context of caste inequalities and poverty.

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GLOSSARY

		KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY
Alag	Separate/Nuclear	
Ānganwādī	Government run centres that provide basic health-care and non-formal pre-school education in villages	
Āshā	Government appointed health worker	
Badlā	Exchange	
Bahū	Son's wife/daughter-in-law	SW
Bhābī	Brother's wife	BW
Bicholīa	Matchmaker	
Bīchwālā	Go-between	
Būā	Father's sister	FZ
Chāchī	Father's younger brother's wife	FyBW
Chaupāl	Courtyard	
Dāī	Midwife	
Devar	Husband's younger brother	HyB
Devrānī	Husband's younger brother's wife	HyBW
Dūkh	Sadness	
Gālī	Verbal abuse	
Galtī	Wrongdoing	
Gaunā	Co-habitation	
Gotrā	Patrilineage or Clan	
Izzat	Honour	
Jeth	Husband's elder brother	HeB
Jethānī	Husband's elder brother's wife	HeBW
Kālā	Literally black, but used for dark skin	

Kām	Work	
Kāmyāb	Successful	
Kanyādān	Gift of a virgin	
Kunbā	Extended family	
Majbūrī	Compulsion	
Māmā	Mother's brother	MB
Mazdūr	Labourer	
Māsī	Mother's sister	MZ
Mazdūrs	Casual labourers	
Nanad	Husband's sister	HZ
Naukrī	Job	
Nikāh	Muslim Marriage Ceremony	
Nirol	Ideal/regular marriage	
Pardā	Veiling/seclusion	
Pardesh	Foreign land	
Pīhar	Natal home	
Randwā	Never-married man/widower	
Rofī	Indian bread	
Sāmān	Goods	
Sarkārī	Government	
Sās	Husband's mother/mother-in-law	HM
Sasurāl	In-laws'/marital home	
Sāth Denā	Supportive relationship	
Shādī	Wedding	
Sharm	Shame	
Sūsar	Husband's father/Father-in-law	HF
Sūkh	Happiness/Peace	
Tāū	Father's elder brother	FeB

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 2000s, numerous reports of a phenomenon described as “bride buying” emerged in the Indian media. The reports provided accounts of a “flourishing trade in women” brought from the poor states of eastern, north-eastern and southern India and “sold” as wives to men in the north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Haryana and Punjab (e.g. Deccan Herald 2007; Hindustan Times 2014; Tribune 2003). What also appeared were reports of NGOs involved in rescuing “trafficked” women “coerced into marriage” that described the phenomenon as “akin to medieval sex slavery” (Blanchet et al. 2003; Empower People 2010; Kant and Pandey 2003). In the midst of such sensational accounts, the issue also became the subject of some academic work that described these as “cross-regional”, “across-region”, “long-distance” marriages or “bride-import” (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Kaur 2004, 2012; Mishra 2013). These studies report the bringing of brides not only from other regions in India but from Bangladesh and Nepal as well. The academic literature drew attention to the geographic distance as well as cultural and linguistic differences that such movement entailed for women and the implications of this for women’s position within marriage, families and communities. In the thesis, I use cross-regional to describe these marriages.

Two issues emerged as significant in the academic literature that highlighted how cross-regional marriages (CRM) represent a “hitherto undocumented” (Kaur 2004: 2595) type of marriage pattern: (1) the reasons that result in a CRM and (2) how they “deviate” from north Indian marriage norms. *Firstly*, these marriages have been explained as resulting from two separate sets of factors – one operating at bride-sending areas (source) and the other at bride-receiving areas (destination). At source, the inability of poor parents to provide a dowry for their daughters due to poverty has been identified as the primary explanation influencing women’s long-distance marriage migration. Other factors identified include: being “socially over age by local standards” (Mishra 2013: 72), failed previous marriage, girl not attractive, family violence or lack of interest on the part of fathers in arranging a marriage (Kaur 2012: 80). Scholars have also explained long-distance marriage migration in terms of a desire to move from poorer to more desirable regions: what Lavelly (1999), in the

Chinese context, describes as “spatial hypergamy”. This echoes some of the common patterns of (global) labour migration by women (Constable 2005: 4).

In her study of CRM in Haryana, Kaur (2004) argues that women themselves use marriage as a strategy to move to more prosperous areas. In a later study, however, she suggests that apart from fulfilling the responsibility of getting a daughter married, parents give daughters in CRM believing that they are sending daughters to more prosperous families and states and hope for some remittances at a future point (Kaur 2010). Studies on inter-provincial and cross-border marriages in China also see marriage migration as the motivation for women to move from poorer to more prosperous provinces (Chao 2005; Davin 2008; Schein 2005). Some argue that, given women’s limited opportunities in the urban labour market due to their low education and skills, hypergamy through marriage may be the only option for economic betterment for them (Gilmartin and Tan 2002). Others suggest that it is women themselves who desire upward mobility and exercise agency in choosing marriage as a strategy to move (Fan and Huang 1998; Fan and Li 2002).

At destination (the north Indian states), highly masculine sex ratios (number of females per thousand males) resulting in a shortage in the number of marriageable women is understood as providing the context for men seeking wives from other states. A large body of literature has outlined the reasons for the increasingly masculine sex ratios in India’s northern states. Studies identify not only pronounced son preference (Agarwal and Unisa 2007; Arnold et al. 1998; Bhat and Sharma 2006; Dasgupta 1987; ICRW 2014; Miller 1997) but also “daughter aversion” – the growing unwantedness of daughters – and the idea that they can be “dispensed with” (John et al. 2009:18) – as main explanations. Pre-natal sex determination and selection¹ (George 2002; Patel 2007), bias in the intra-household distribution of food and nutritive elements, and poor medical care during illness of girl children (Agnihotri 2001, 2003; Bhat and Sharma 2006), what Miller (1997) describes as “sex selective child care”, account for the persisting gender imbalance. Scholars consider

¹ Since the mid-1980s, new technologies (first amniocentesis and later ultrasound) became widely available in India. Initially developed to aid the detection of foetal abnormalities they came to be increasingly used to determine the sex of foetus that is then followed by sex-selective abortion.

the strong preference for sons and daughter disfavour in north India is related to patrilineal systems of descent, inheritance and patterns of post-marital residence and dowry (Dasgupta 1987; John et al. 2009; Miller 1981, 1997).

In addition, studies on CRM argue that other compulsions make it difficult for some men to get married within the regional context. These include unemployment, landlessness or marginal landownership, hard labour occupations, physical disability, lack of education, “older” age or prior marital status (these may be secondary marriages for men) and “flawed” reputation (Blanchet 2008; Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Chowdhry 2005; Kaur 2004; Mishra 2013) The literature on China similarly notes that it is “disadvantaged” men who are left out of the local marriage markets (Davin 2008; Fan and Huang 1998; Min and Eades 1995).

The *second* issue highlighted in the scholarly literature is that CRMs are taking place in rural communities in north India marked by norms of caste or community endogamy, *gotrā* [patrilineage or clan] and village/territorial exogamy and linguistic and cultural commonality. *Gotrā* exogamy is often extended to the entire village or neighbouring villages, but operates within a restricted geographical region, i.e. within the state. Patri-virilocality is the predominant pattern of post-marital residence with a woman moving from her parents’ to her husband’s home and village. The institution of marriage itself thus entails migration for all women in north India (Palriwala and Uberoi 2008: 24). Dowry is the predominant and honourable form of marriage payment. These norms give a particular colour to marriage as a continuing “strategy” for social reproduction (Bourdieu 1976, 1977).

Marriage is thus regulated and breaches in community and marriage norms are not tolerated. Indeed, they are often punished with violence termed “honour” crimes/killings (Chakravarti 2005; Chowdhry 2007; Mody 2008; PUDR 2003). In this thesis, I use the term regional marriage (RM) to describe all marriages that conform to the afore-mentioned norms. I do not use “local” marriage (unlike the existing literature), as regional captures the specificity of a marriage arranged within the north Indian region/state. I do not use “normative” marriage because I include variants in the category of RM (such as dowryless marriages) that are caste endogamous and arranged with the “acceptable” marriage distance.

CRMs, however, contravene caste (at times even religious), linguistic and state boundaries and the marriage distance often exceeds a thousand kilometres. Thus, while marriage entails territorial dislocation for most women in rural north India, the distance travelled by cross-regional brides (CRB) is abnormally large. These marriages are not self-arranged “love” marriages in defiance of parental authority and marital norms but in most cases are initiated by the grooms and are “accepted” by their families, caste and village communities despite being inter-caste/religious. There is no dowry in such marriages and the groom meets the wedding expenses. Studies argue that in almost all cases, the groom makes a payment to a middlemen or go-between for the marriage (Blanchet 2008; Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Kaur 2004).

The go-betweens are often CRBs themselves married in villages of north India (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Kaur 2004; Mishra 2013). Other studies note the role of migrant labourers (Ahlawat 2009; Kaur 2012), truck-drivers and retired army men (Kukreja and Kumar 2013) in mediating CRM. Some studies argue that the go-betweens are professional suppliers of women (Blanchet et al. 2003; Kant and Pandey 2003; Singh 2009) with women being “duped and betrayed as the middlemen lure them out of the sanctuary of their homes with false promises” (Mukherjee 2013: 44). A large body of literature on cross-border/transnational marriages that are categorised as commercially-mediated over long-distances, as are CRMs, also sees all women in such marriages as “mail-order brides”, commodities or trafficked women (cf. Constable 2005; see also Williams 2010 for a review). Writing on CRM in Haryana, Kaur describes trafficking, bride-buying and bride-price marriages as analytically distinct and argues that CRMs do not fall in any of these categories (2004: 2598). In my earlier work in a village in north-central UP, I argued that CRMs are a new kind of commercially-mediated marriage involving payment to a go-between that does not fit into any of the available categories for social analysis of marriage practices (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011: 337).

Based on the above, scholars have described CRMs as a “new phenomenon” (Kukreja and Kumar 2013:5) “hitherto undocumented”, “unusual” or “unconventional” (Kaur 2004: 2595-6) even though several studies suggest that such

marriages have a long history in the northern region. Writing on Punjab in 1925, Darling described “a regular traffic of women...imported from the hills of Kangra, the plains of the Ganges and the deserts of Bikaner” ([1928], 1977: 49-50). Ethnographic studies on western UP districts note the “buying of wives” from the “hills” or the “east” (eastern UP or even Bihar) or from some distance away to the south or the west (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997: 238) or the “bringing a bride for a price” from the northern UP hill districts (Raheja 1988: 236). Berreman points to the marriage of women from poor families from a village in the lower Himalayas of north India into “distant places” (1972: 75). Studies on CRM maintain that while such marriages have existed historically, they are no longer “exceptional” (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011: 312), with men of almost every caste bringing CRBs (Kaur 2004) and the influx of brides into the north Indian states increasing over the years (Mishra 2013). Kaur writes: “Long-distance, cross-region marriage is becoming a socially, if not numerically, significant category of marriage migration in India” (2012: 79).

In India, as in most of South Asia, marriage is tied to the social reproduction of families and communities, fulfilment of sexual needs, inheritance, rights and status, labour and provision of care. Marriage as an institution holds “hegemonic sway”. Marriage thus “excludes; it marginalises those who fall outside its parameters or never enter it” (Palriwala and Kaur 2014: 5). In his work on the Pandits (Brahmans) of rural Kashmir in the late 1950s, Madan noted that bachelors were “pitied” (2002: 89). In the Indian countryside, Kaur writes that bachelors are marginalised and “referred to as *bechārā*” [one without food or resources] (2008: 113). What appears to be “new” in the contemporary context is a moral panic regarding men in north India who would fail to marry, with demographers predicting that in future an even larger proportion of men would remain single on account of a “marriage squeeze” resulting from highly masculine sex ratios at birth (Hudson and Boer 2002; Guilmoto 2012).

An emerging body of literature has focused on the (negative) implications of (involuntary) bachelorhood. Some studies, mainly on China, for instance, see “a dramatic increase in crime” as a consequence of the contemporary gender imbalance (Edlund et al. 2013: 1532). Some others anticipate that surplus unmarried males

could become a significant HIV risk group (Tucker et al., 2005), and could increase violence against women (rape and sexual harassment), the demand for sex work and trafficking (Zhang 2010). Likewise, for India, South et al. (2014) postulate that an abundance of males would increase the likelihood of theft, assault and harassment of women in public spaces.

The terms *malāṅg* translated as “chronic bachelor” and *chharā* are used in Haryana and Punjab respectively (Kaur 2013: 40) and in China, the stigmatising term “bare branches” is used to connote a single man who failed to get married (Eklund 2013: 66). Media reports have highlighted the predicament of unmarried men who have created forums such as the Unmarried Youth Organisation in Haryana making “give brides, get votes” a slogan to get political parties to address the concerns of “chronic bachelors” (e.g. Deccan Herald 2014).

Studies note that the problem of bride shortages was resolved in the past through the practice of polyandry (Darling 1977; Hershman 1981; Pettigrew 1975), or involuntary bachelorhood (Kaur 2008), or marriage with women of inferior castes (Hershman 1981; Pocock 1972). In the contemporary context, the increasing visibility of CRBs in the north Indian states has been explained as a response to this inability of some men to marry within their caste and regional communities.

What also appears to be “new” in the present context is a second moral panic surrounding CRM, with not only NGO and journalistic accounts but also some academic work focusing on the “harsh lives and the low status” of CRBs (Blanchet 2008: 177). Ahlawat (forthcoming) in her work on Haryana focuses specifically on the violence that CRBs suffer, even though the widespread acceptance of domestic violence in Haryana has been noted by studies (e.g. Chowdhry 2012). Mukherjee asserts “the negotiating capacity of these women is very low” (2013: 42, 47) and Chowdhry argues: “Not more than bonded labour they are subjected to extensive exploitation of all kinds” (2005: 5195). Much of the discussion has focused on CRMs: (a) being a consequence of masculine sex ratios and bride shortages (b) deviating from north Indian marriage norms (c) involving the “sale” and “purchase” of poor women from poor districts and states and (d) their low status and lack of agency in receiving communities.

A few academic studies, however, have challenged portrayals of all CRBs as “victims” (Mishra 2013: 75). Kaur writes: “Not all marriages are a failure and not all brides are unhappy after the initial adjustment” (2013: 83) and “...It would be an incomplete representation of the truth to argue that companionate conjugality fails to develop in all such marriages” (2013: 85). These studies examine the post-marital experiences of CRBs at times drawing parallels and contrasts with “local brides”, but make only CRM the subject of analysis (e.g. Mishra 2013). Further, some of these studies are based on surveys (Kukreja and Kumhar 2013) or not “sufficient ethnographic” but “limited evidence” (Kaur 2012: 79).

What gap does this research aim to fill?

Much theorising on marriage in India had initially been about structure and rules, with there then being a shift in focus with “ideology, dynamics and everyday practices” becoming the subject of analysis (see Uberoi 1994; Palriwala and Kaur 2014). The literature on marriage in India could be broadly placed in the following categories: (1) Marriage rules and patterns; (2) Love and arranged marriage (3) Modes of arrangement/matchmaking (4) Divorce, widowhood and remarriage; (5) Marriage payments and inheritance; (6) Post-marital residence, support and autonomy; (7) Marriage and migration; (8) Marriage and work and (9) Marital violence. Instead of a separate review of this literature, I integrate it in different chapters of the thesis in order to locate my findings within it.

It is only recently that studies are beginning to address issues of conjugal intimacy and lived experiences in marriage (e.g. Grover 2011). The focus of a growing body of literature has been on how “modernity”, globalisation and demographic shifts are impacting marriage practices (e.g. see edited volume Kaur and Palriwala 2014). As in western contexts, studies have attempted to decentre heterosexual marriage by focusing instead on same-sex relationships (e.g. Biswas 2011) and alternative living arrangements such as co-habitation without marriage or singlehood (e.g. Agrawal 2012). Recent studies on marriage have focused on the middle-class in urban India (e.g. WS Jadavpur University 2009) or are based on fieldwork in urban neighbourhoods, slums or state institutions such as courts (e.g. Bapna 2012; Dhanda 2012; Mody 2008). What appears to be a glaring gap in the recent literature on

marriage are studies based in rural areas where marriage remains compulsory for women. Based on fieldwork in villages in the mid-1970s, 1980s and early 1990s several ethnographic studies provided insights into married women's lives (e.g. Jeffery et. al. 1989; Jeffery and Jeffery 1996; Minturn 1993; Raheja and Gold 1994; Palriwala 2001; Sharma 1980; Wadley 1994). Since then, there has been little interest in researching marriage in rural contexts.

My research stemmed from an interest in CRM specifically. Yet attempts at understanding the moral panic around these marriages and their descriptions as “new” and “unconventional” led me to ask: what is a “conventional” or “local” or (as I describe it) a regional marriage? Further, what about the status and agency of women in RM as earlier studies, particularly in rural north Indian contexts, have drawn attention to the constraints within which married women live their lives? Thus, through this research I aim:

Firstly, to address: whether CRMs are only a consequence of sex ratios. By doing so, I will attempt to point out the limitations of the understandings based on demographic factors alone that have been the focus of a body of the literature that attempts to explain CRM and bachelorhood. Through ethnographic work that explores local masculinities and caste differences in livelihoods etc., I highlight that these are crucial alongside sex ratios and some men are affected more than others by demographics. Further, in order to address the moral panic about “surplus” unmarried men, important factors such as land and labour need attention as campaigns on sex selective abortion, for instance, would only address one aspect of this and inadequately at that. This is an issue that deserves attention as it helps to explain why men seek brides from other states.

Secondly, to provide an account of CRBs' post-marital experiences based on ethnographic research in a village in the western part of the north Indian state of UP. The context within which CRMs are arranged, the differential modes of arrangement, payments involved, cultural and linguistic differences and the geographic distance over which CRBs migrate for marriage has been the subject of much of the existing literature on CRM. As mentioned above, studies are beginning to address CRBs'

post-marital experiences. My interest, however, lies in comparing how CRBs and RBs live their everyday lives within marital and familial relationships.

My work thus marks a departure from existing studies on CRM in that it attempts to address questions related to status and agency in marriage by focusing on RBs as well. By doing so, I wish to interrogate the moral panic surrounding CRMs. By focusing on CRM and RM, I aim to arrive at an understanding of arranged marriage and its gendered implications for women and fill the gap in the literature on rural women's intimate lives. Drawing inspiration from the sociology of everyday life (e.g. Adler et al. 1987; Pink 2012; see also Neal and Murji 2015 edited special issue), I explore married women's experiences of the everyday, as everyday life-approaches not only recognise the significance of the ordinary and take it seriously as a category of analysis, but additionally "evidence how everyday life social relations, experiences and practices are always more than simply or straightforwardly mundane, ordinary and routine" (Neal and Murji 2015: 811-12).

Research Questions

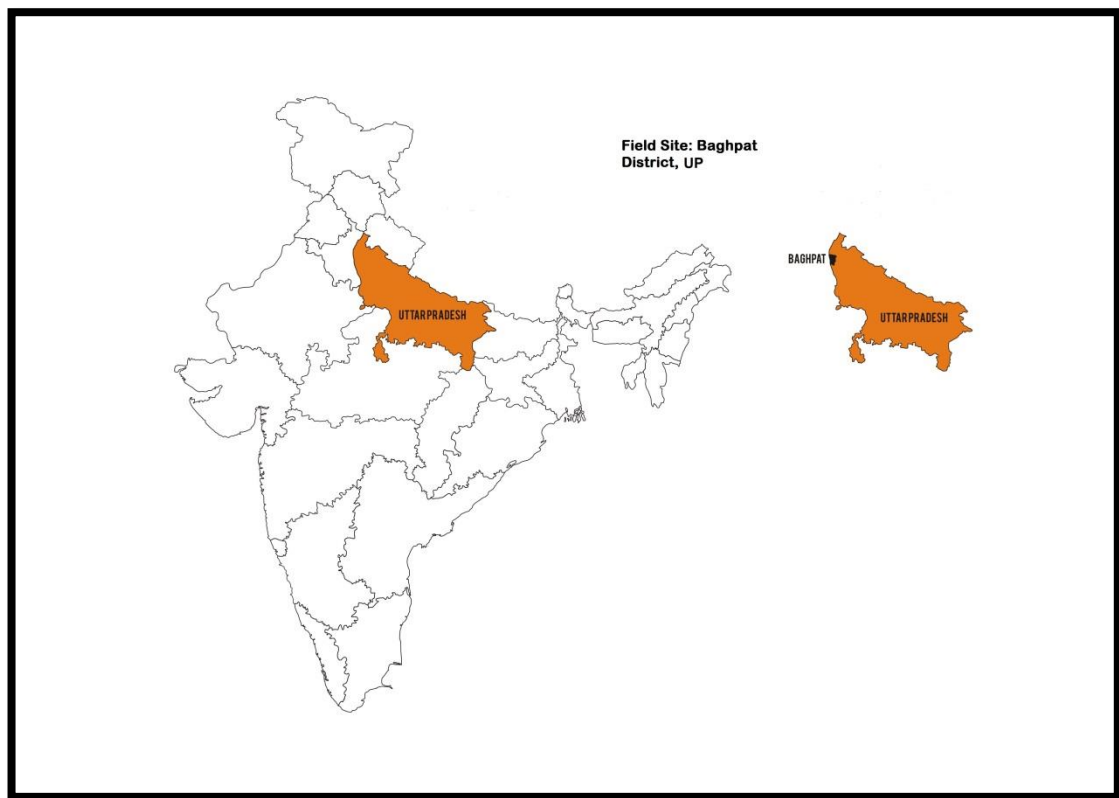
As marriage is both a structured set of norms and values that define the limits from within which spouses can be selected and a set of social relations not only between two individuals but also two social groups, I aim to address how relations between men and women and sets of kin (wife-givers and wife-takers) are lived out and transformed in everyday contexts and over time. Women's lives are also embedded in other power relations, i.e., caste and class, so apart from examining how regional differences and geographic distance shape women's post-marital experiences, I wish to explore how caste and class factors shape their everyday experiences over the course of their married lives. Thus, the questions that this research seeks to address are:

- How does the lived experience of marriage of CRBs compare with RBs?
- How do factors of caste, class/poverty, religion and age shape how marital relations are lived and experienced in day-to-day contexts?
- How much agency do women in CRMs experience relative to those in RMs?

The Field site: Barampur Village, Baghpat District

Located in the western part of the north Indian state of UP (the most populous state in India), Baghpat district was created in 1997. Until then it was a *tehsil* [administrative division] of Meerut district. Baghpat is one of the 75 districts of UP (see Map 1 below). Its western boundary is the bank of the Yamuna river. The total area of the district is 1321 sq.kms. It is divided into three *tehsils* (Baraut, Baghpat and Khekra). The total population of the district is more than 1.3 million. The Scheduled Castes² constitute 11.4 per cent of the population (Census of India 2011) and Muslims constitute 24.7 per cent of the population of the district (Census of India 2001).

Map 1: Field Site: Baghpat District, UP



Barampur (a pseudonym) village is located on the State Highway that connects Delhi to Saharanpur district. The village is regarded as one of the largest villages of UP

² Scheduled Castes is the official designation for the ex-untouchable or disadvantaged caste groups. The Indian constitution entitles them to reservation in government employment and educational institutions.

comprising of 1657 households (Census of India 2011). It has a population of 9884, of which 5417 are male and 4467 female representing an overall sex ratio of 824. The sex ratio in the 0-6 age group is 849. The Scheduled Caste population of the village is 958 (9.7 per cent of the total population), of which 496 are male and 462 female and the sex ratio 931. Nearly 66 per cent of the population is literate and 73.7 per cent males and 55.5 per cent females are literate. The village has 3164 workers (2782 main workers, 382 marginal workers) and 6720 non-workers.

The nearest town, an expanding commercial centre is four kms away. Barampur has no independent commercial significance. Till about the 1980s, it was famous for metal agricultural implements, with its traditional blacksmiths working out on the main street. The street is now a common market with Lohar and other Muslim caste households clustered around. Barampur is divided into three *pattis* [a belt of dwellings] with the Chamar [the largest Scheduled caste in the region] *mohallā* [neighbourhood] adjoining the irrigation canal (one of the many that criss-cross the region drawing from the upper Ganga canal system). Over time, other caste households developed all around with some Chamar and Valmiki families (Scheduled Castes) now clustered together behind the main village temple. Jat households (the dominant caste) are concentrated in two *pattis*. Most of the houses in Barampur are *puccā* [permanent house] or *kucchā-puccā* mixed [semi-permanent] with a handful of *kucchā* houses [temporary].

I discuss the field site further in Chapter One and now I move on to establish the conceptual territory in which the thesis is located. In the thesis, I draw on several bodies of literature. For this reason, rather than a separate literature review chapter, I have integrated most critical discussions of the substantive literature in the different chapters. Throughout the thesis, however, I draw on particular concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu that I find useful for my work, so I outline these below and draw on them in the chapters that follow. As discussed earlier, the question of the agency of CRBs has been the subject of much of the writing on CRM. The debates on agency are thus crucial to an exploration of women's (RBs and CRBs) lived experiences of marriage. Discussions of agency constitute a very large body of literature within the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, Development Studies and Gender Studies. The

understandings of agency that I draw on for my work are those that arose from my data and these I also outline below.

Key Concepts Tying the Research Together

Bourdieu: Strategies, Habitus, Capital, Social Reproduction

In the thesis, I draw on various concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu as he outlines how people navigate through the social contexts in which they find themselves. His framework is a useful way of approaching some of the structure/agency, coercion/victimhood issues as well as understanding processes that result in continuities over time that are important for my discussion of men and women's lives in north India. The notions of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* are core to his theoretical framework of practice and its role in social reproduction. He defines *habitus* as "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (1977:72). Bourdieu brings together ideas of structure and tendency through a focus on "dispositions" that generate practice. He writes: "The *habitus* is necessity internalised and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions" (1984:170). Bourdieu's *habitus* is useful in explaining the re-socialisation process that all married women to some extent or another undergo as they leave their parents' home to live and accommodate at their marital homes and how over time newly acquired practices become habitual (see Chapter Five).

Bourdieu defines a *field* as "a structured social space". He writes: "It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field" (cited in Thomson 2013: 74). Social fields, he discusses, are marked by *distinction*. By *distinction* he means clusters of individuals in social space have distinct cultures that mark them out from one another. Members of different clusters seek to establish the superiority of their cultural peculiarities. In Bourdieu's scheme, "the habituation of both cultural differences and criteria for judging them" 'higher' or 'lower' is crucial, for this provides space for difference and inequalities between clusters to seem natural and inevitable (Bourdieu 1984; Crossley 2013: 94). In Chapter Eight, I

draw on Bourdieu's understanding of class distinction and how these are "naturalised" and "inscribed in people's minds" to examine how in every-day interactions, caste distinctions are made through "language" and "judgements", that enable the perpetuation of hierarchies and social inequality.

Bourdieu outlines three kinds of capital – *social*, *cultural* and *economic* capital. *Social capital* is defined in terms of social obligations or "connections" – "a durable network of relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" that may in certain conditions be converted into economic capital (1986: 248). *Economic capital* is defined as that which may be converted into money and institutionalised in the form of property rights, and *cultural capital* is that which may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications and in certain conditions can be converted into economic capital (1986: 243). In Chapter Three, I draw on Bourdieu's ideas on the convertibility of the forms of capital to highlight how men are positioned differently in the *social field* by virtue of the *social*, *cultural* and *economic capital* they possess. Men who succeed in using the forms of capital to secure employment, are deemed marriageable as opposed to those who cannot and hence either fail to marry or resort to lesser ways of marrying.

Bourdieu uses the concept of *strategy* to emphasize the creative and active nature of practices. He sees each social field of practice (including society as a whole) as a "field of struggles" or a competitive game in which actors improvise strategically to be able to optimise their positions (Bourdieu 1977; Maton 2013: 53, 56). The notion of *strategy* in Bourdieu's framework then leaves scope for "the creative interpretation of rules" (Kabeer 2001: 45). I use this concept in Chapter Three to demonstrate the ways in which individuals strategise to find ways to marry within a context that is adverse in order to ensure the continuity of the family and caste group. Through his concepts of *habitus* and *strategy*, Bourdieu creates a bridge between structure and agency.

Agency

In this section, I outline different conceptions of agency that I draw on in the thesis to examine how women act in the face of structural constraint. I focus mainly on

conceptualisations of agency that have been developed in the writing on women in the global South. Mohanty (1988) draws attention to the tendency in western feminist writing to portray the “Third World Woman” as passive and in need of saving. Since then there have been several attempts to view women as agents, continually navigating through their social worlds. In the development studies literature agency has been discussed in the context of women’s empowerment. Kabeer defines empowerment as the process whereby “those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such as an ability” (1999: 437). She states that the ability to make choices can be understood in terms of three inter-related dimensions: resources (that include not only current access but also future claims to material and human and social resources), agency (processes of decision-making as well as agency manifested in the form of bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance) and achievements (well-being outcomes) (1999: 435).

Like Bourdieu, Kabeer recognises the structural dimensions of choice. She points to the possible inequalities in people’s capacity to make choices and she stresses the “conditions of choice – choice made from the vantage point of alternatives” (1999: 439). Madhok et al. also emphasise the significance of attending to inequalities and recognising coercion in the analysis of agentic action (2013: 11). They focus not only on individual constraints and vulnerabilities but also on the “exploitative power relations within which modes of agency become available, are enacted, eclipsed or gain aspirational status” (2013: 12). In Chapter three, I draw on these understandings of agency that recognise the possibilities for the exercise of women’s agency within social relations of inequality.

Some work on agency has focused on women’s resistance (e.g. see Seymour 2006 for a review of discussions in the anthropological literature). In their work in rural Rajasthan and UP, Raheja and Gold, drawing on James Scott (1985), outline their interest in “everyday forms of resistance”. They highlight how through songs and speech women express their resistance to dominant north Indian ideologies of kinship and gender and “communicate alternative self-perceptions and vantage points on their social world” (1994: 2). Jeffery and Jeffery argue that citing evidences of women’s resistance is one thing but it is important not to exaggerate the potential of

women's everyday resistance as women act "within largely unalterable structures" (1996: 16). Other scholars also note the tendency to romanticise and reduce agency to resistance (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1990 writing on Bedouin women in Egypt). Jeffery and Jeffery further state that women's agency does not always take the form of resistance as women also have many stakes in the system. Their agency might entail acquiescence and coercing other women (1996: 20).

Likewise, Kandiyoti (1988) and Sangari (1993) also delineate notions of agency that attend to consent and complicity. Sangari focuses on "social structured and often sanctioned forms of indirect agency". She notes that unless certain distributions of power are made within patriarchal arrangements it is difficult to imagine how any degree of consent from women can be obtained (1993: 867, 869). Consent may range from acquiescence or passive acceptance to active collusion. Consent is determined by various factors – social pressures, coercion that pushes women to conform to standards of normative behaviour, affective relationships, economic dependence and the offer of protection (1993: 869).

Similarly, in her discussion of systems of "classic patriarchy" such as India, Kandiyoti explains the "thorough internalisation" of patriarchy by women themselves (1988: 279). She uses the term "patriarchal bargain" to argue that "women strategize within a set of concrete constraints" (1988: 275). She elaborates that within the patriarchal extended family, the deprivation and hardship that a woman experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she gradually acquires as she progresses in her married life over her own subservient daughters-in-law. The anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women leads women to conform to and become complicit with systems that subordinate them (1988: 279), as I discuss in Chapter Five. Rao points out that it is important to take note that "the expressions of agency and the possibilities of resistance change over an individual's life course" (2015: 417). I highlight in the chapters that follow how the opportunities for exercising agency increase for most woman as they advance in their married lives.

Some, like Mahmood (2001), stress the need to think of agency as "the capacity to endure, suffer and persist" (2001: 17). She argues for an understanding that does not

treat agency as synonymous with resistance or subversion but sees it as “a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable” (2001: 210). Reader (2007) proposes a conception of personhood that recognises “patiency” that, like Mahmood, attends to passivity, suffering, endurance, weakness, vulnerability and constraint. Reader sees these as inseparable from the agential features of the active, capable, free and independent person. In Chapter Six, I draw on these understandings to highlight how women suffer and endure the inequality and violence of the marital relationship.

While most of the understandings of agency I draw on relate to discussions of women in the global South, in Chapter Seven, I use Duncan’s (2014) notion of agency as relational and constrained that he outlines in his work on couples living apart together (LAT) in Britain. Duncan delineates three forms of agency – constrained, strategic and vulnerable. He argues that women’s agency is “variably constrained and relational, bonded and emotional, and habitually traditional, as well as purposeful and reflexive” (2014: 17). I draw on Duncan’s concept of agency to show that women’s agency, particularly in situations of marital crisis, is not independent but dependent on and mediated by other individuals (mainly male kin).

Structure of the Thesis

I now move on to provide a chapter-wise summary of the thesis. This introduction is followed by a chapter on the methods and ethics entailed in carrying out ethnographic fieldwork on women’s experiences of marriage. It outlines the reasons for the choice of Barampur village as the site for this research, the methods (survey, semi-structured and structured interviews, observation and informal conversations) used to gather data to address the research questions and the selection of respondents for the study. It then delineates the process of getting entry into the field, establishing rapport, the role of facilitators and the obstacles faced with regard to gaining access to informants. I reflect on how my positionality – gender, age, marital status, caste and urban background – had a bearing on the research process. In the last part of the chapter, I discuss the ethical dilemmas I faced in the course of fieldwork.

Chapter Two describes the norms observed in negotiating a RM. I demonstrate that RMs include a range of marriage forms, with some regarded as ideal and prestigious and others as lower forms of marriage. I discuss the intermediaries or matchmakers involved in making a RM and the changes with regard to modes of marriage arrangement over time. I address the issue of “choice” available to young men and women in decisions concerning when and whom to marry. In the last section of the chapter, I detail the marriage payments that RMs entail, especially dowry that is the dominant form of marriage payment. Additionally, I discuss dowryless marriages and marriages involving payment to the bride’s parents, understood as bride-sale in local perception, that exist alongside the practice of dowry.

In Chapter Three, I outline the reasons operating at both bride-sending and bride-receiving areas that result in a CRM. I move beyond demographic explanations to examine why some men fail to meet idealised norms of marriage, outlined in Chapter two and the strategies they adopt in response to this situation. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss the factors that influence women’s migration over long-distances, into a culturally and linguistically different region, for marriage.

Chapter Four discusses the process of negotiation entailed in CRMs. I begin by examining the role of matchmakers or go-betweens in CRM and the payments involved in order to address questions related to the “sale” and “purchase” of CRBs. In the last part of the chapter, I address what makes a marriage a marriage by focusing on rituals and practices regarded as necessary within the regional context to provide social legitimisation to a marriage. In view of this, I examine whether in local perception, alliances arranged over long-distances and across regions are recognised as “legitimate” marriages.

Chapters Five to Eight focus on RBs’ and CRBs’ experiences of married life. In Chapter Five, I compare what the process of adjustment in the marital home means for RBs and CRBs who leave their natal kin and homes to live at their marital home post-marriage. Additionally, I explore how cultural and linguistic differences and geographic distance shape the process of adjustment for CRBs. For CRBs and RBs alike, I examine aspects of everyday life: the work that women do and the

relationships they are able to establish with other women within and outside of their households in their marital villages.

Chapter Six focuses on women's relationships with their husbands. For CRBs and RBs alike, I focus on sexual relations, reproductive "choice" and marital violence to highlight the inequality of the marital relationship. Drawing on Jamieson's (2011) definitions of intimacy and practices of intimacy, I then explore women's understandings of *sāth denā* [a supportive relationship] to highlight the possibilities for conjugal support and intimacy despite the inequality and violence of the marital relationship.

In Chapter Seven, I explore women's relationships with their natal kin. For CRBs and RBs, I discuss the frequency of visits to the natal home over the course of a woman's married life, the significance of gift-giving in sustaining affinal relationships and securing a woman's place in her marital home and the factors that determine a woman's access to natal kin support. I highlight the significance of natal kin support for a married woman particularly in situations of violence, marital dispute and widowhood. Through a focus on these issues, I point to differences in the experiences of CRBs and RBs.

Chapter Eight focuses on CRM. I begin by outlining the reasons behind the "acceptability" of inter-caste CRMs within a "rigid" caste endogamous context. I then delineate issues related to discrimination, belonging and incorporation of CRBs. I explore the implications of CRM for the children of CR couples, focusing on the caste status of the children of these inter-caste unions and on their marriages. Firstly, however, the next chapter gives an account of the methods used to compare cross-regional brides' and regional brides' lived experiences.

CHAPTER ONE: METHODS, ETHICS AND ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK: REFLECTIONS FROM RURAL NORTH INDIA

I firmly believe that ethnography cannot be understood independently of the experience which produces it.

(Berreman 1972: vii)

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe my experience of living and doing ethnography in a north Indian village. I begin by outlining the reasons for choosing Barampur as the field site for my research and then discuss the methods I used to address my research questions. I explain how I selected key respondents for the study, the role of facilitators in providing entry and the difficulties I encountered in gaining access to informants. I provide a description of how I recorded and analysed the field data. In the last part of the chapter, I discuss ethical considerations focusing on issues of informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, avoiding harm to research participants and ensuring researcher safety and psychological well-being. Throughout the chapter, I reflect on my positionality as “ethnographic representations” are “positioned truths” (Abu-Lughod 1991: 142) – how my gender, marital status, caste and middle-class, urban background influenced the perceptions that my participants had of me and the information that I was able to access and gather.

1.1. What Led me to Barampur: Selection of Field Site

In 2008 and again in 2010, as part of a project on gender and (labour) migration, I visited Barampur village. At the time, respondents mentioned the difficulties that men from the Chamar (Scheduled Caste) community in particular had been facing since the late 1990s in finding wives. This had led them to “buy” wives from other states. Informants did not use a term to describe these marriages but when talking about them, they referred to CRBs as *bāhar se/kī* [from outside], *dur kī* [from faraway], *purabnī* [from the east], *Bihārī* [from Bihar] or *mol kī* [bought wife]. When I returned to India in July 2012 to carry out fieldwork and visited Barampur as a potential site for my research, Chamar informants suggested that the difficulties that young men in their 20s, specifically those employed in brick-kiln work, faced had

increased. Likewise, informants talked about the inability of some Jat (dominant caste) men to marry on account of unemployment or lack of salaried employment and a significant proportion of bachelors among them.

My research focuses on the lived experiences of women in regional marriages (RM) and cross-regional marriages (CRM). As the latter are known to be taking place in the north/north-western Indian states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Rajasthan, my choice of field-site had to be limited to these states. I decided to work on UP and the western part of the state for several reasons.

First, there is literature (academic and NGO) on CRM in Haryana and Punjab (Ahlawat 2009, Chowdhry 2005; Kaur 2004, 2010; Mishra 2013; Mukherjee 2013; Kant and Pandey 2003; Pushkarna 2005; Rathee 2004; Singh 2009) and more recent work on Rajasthan (Kukreja and Kumar 2013). Similar studies on the subject based on fieldwork in UP have focused on the eastern (Blanchet 2003, 2008; Kaur 2012) and north-central (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011) parts of the state. There is no study of CRM in western UP where such marriages are known to be taking place and the sex ratios, often considered to provide the context for these marriages (as discussed in the Introduction) are among the most masculine in the state.

Second, the research being an ethnographic study required me to stay in the village for the duration of the fieldwork that lasted for eleven months (September 2012-August 2013). The choice of field site was thus also influenced by practical considerations – gaining entry and access, finding a safe place to stay and people I could rely on in the field. As I had carried out fieldwork in this village before, I used the help of the (Chamar) family who had helped during my earlier fieldwork to gain entry into the Chamar community. During my fieldwork, I lived in a Jat household as I wanted a place where I could have the basic facilities not available in lower caste households (e.g. a toilet and electricity). Further, a Jat family could help me gain entry into Jat households but also into other castes. Given the power dynamics underpinning caste relations in rural India, only a Jat family could offer the protection that I needed while I was in the field. I was introduced to this family by the village headman, also a Jat.

Existing academic studies on CRM are based on fieldwork carried out with CRBs in several villages and districts of one or more states. Further, in any given village CRMs are in a minority that explains the choice of multiple sites for research on CRBs. I decided to confine my study to a single village for several reasons: unlike other studies, my research focuses on women in both CRM and RM and seeks to explore how caste, class, religion and age/years of marriage in addition to region shape women's post-marital experiences. It aims to place CRM within larger systems of RM arrangements and changes in the political economy that have a bearing on marriageability in this context (see Chapter Three). Barampur is one of the largest villages in UP (in terms of population) comprising over 1600 households. It is a multi-caste village and I found a significant number of CRBs in the village (approximately 45). Moreover, villages are not isolated units but are embedded in wider networks through labour migration, marriage etc. In north India, as marriages are arranged outside the village at times in other districts of the state (see 2.1), the findings of the study can shed light on marriage practices within a larger geographical region.

One of the aims of the research is to contextualise CRM, which requires an understanding of factors operating both at bride-sending and bride-receiving areas. When I started fieldwork in September 2012, this research was meant to be multi-sited with UP the primary field site. I intended to spend nine months in UP and two to four months in one of the source states from which CRBs had migrated into Barampur following marriage. In the course of fieldwork, I decided to limit my fieldwork to Barampur for several reasons.

I faced several difficulties in accessing informants (see 1.4) and so I had to extend my stay in UP beyond what I had anticipated. Another problem was with regard to selecting a site/s in the source states. In Barampur, CRBs had migrated in from different villages in thirteen districts of five states (see Chapter Three, Part Two). Due to both time and monetary constraints, it was not possible to trace the families of each of the key CRB informants in their native states. While visits to the source states may have provided additional insights on the conditions that influenced this marriage migration and an opportunity to talk to some family members of CRBs,

fieldwork at source states was not feasible. Given the research focus on women's post-marital experiences, I decided to confine my fieldwork to Barampur – the bride-receiving area. Data on why women migrated over long-distances for marriage were collected through interviews with CRBs (see Chapter Three, Part Two).

1.2. Methods of Data Collection

The aim of my research is to capture the informants' points of view, experiences and understanding of experiences and to produce explanations and "thick description" (Geertz 1973). Some of the issues that the research raises could be addressed only by "being there" (Geertz [1988], 2004) through the long-term and intensive fieldwork that ethnography entails. First, I gathered data through a survey of the village households. For the purpose of this research, a household is defined as a unit sharing a common kitchen. Recently married but resident daughters were excluded as household members, while recently married daughters-in-law not yet residing in the household were included. Barampur has twenty-two caste groups and the survey covered all castes of the village (see Table 1.1). Of them, I choose five castes (Jat, Chamar, Kumhar, Teli and Lohar) for intensive study.

Given the large size of this village, one-fourth of the total households within each caste were selected for the survey. Every fourth household was selected from a house list provided by the *panchāyat* [local self-government institution] secretary. The survey gathered information on: caste, religion, *gotrā* [clan], structure of household (joint/nuclear), property/assets and sex, age, education, marital status, occupation and income of individual household members (see Appendix One). It also collected data on migration details of household members and marriage details (age at marriage, marriage distance etc.) of couples and out-married women (daughters/sisters) of the household. Occupation, income (daily/weekly/monthly) and property/assets were used as variables to assess economic status of a household. Data on age (particularly women's age) and age at marriage are not entirely reliable. I attempted to calculate a woman's age based on the estimates that informants provided of age at marriage, age of the first born and time span between wedding and birth of first child. When I asked about age at marriage, informants either said 18 years (the legal marriage age

for women) or 16-17. When I questioned women about their husbands' ages, they asked me to add three to four years to their ages.

Table 1.1: Castes in Barampur (Source: Village Survey)

Hindu Castes	
1.	Jat
2.	Chamar
3.	Valmiki
4.	Kumhar
5.	Brahmin
6.	Jogi
7.	Bairagi
8.	Dakaut
9.	Julaha
10.	Nai
11.	Darzi
12.	Dhimar
13.	Bharbuja
14.	Badhai
15.	Manihar
16.	Sonar
17.	Bania
Muslim Castes	
18.	Teli
19.	Lohar
20.	Faqir
21.	Dhobi
22.	Neelgarh

As I started the writing process, I felt that instead of a selective survey that covered all castes, a full census of households of the five castes selected for intensive study would have yielded more useful and generalisable information. For instance, it would

have shed light on whether informant perceptions such as “the present generation of men in their 20s are more educated than men of their father’s generation” were accurate. Barampur is a large village, however, and it was not possible for me to survey the entire village. If more time and resources had been available to me, that would have enabled me to make firmer claims on some matters, yet the partial village survey provided basic information on important aspects of life in the village. It was also a good way for me to establish my presence in the village and familiarise myself with potential informants for intensive interviews. The survey helped me gather information on the castes in the village and provided an estimate of number of households per caste, information that informants could not provide given the large size of this village. A (partial) survey of all castes also enabled me to be more confident about locating CRBs, given their stigmatised status.

Additionally, I conducted several semi-structured interviews each with 38 key respondents: 19 RBs and 19 CRBs belonging to the five castes (see Appendix Two). The problems of access to women had a bearing on the number of key informants selected for interviewing (see 1.4). I also conducted 25 shorter structured interviews aimed at gaining an understanding of the changing context with regard to marriage practices. The informants for shorter structured interviews included: husbands of some CRBs; CRBs who had acted as intermediaries for marriages from their native states; never-married men (over 40 years) and elderly men (school and college teachers, retired army men, the village headmen etc.) and government appointed health workers (see Appendix Two). Ethnographic interviewing enables researchers to “establish on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their world” (Heyl 2001: 369). Both the time factor (duration and frequency of contact) and the quality of the emerging relationships that ethnography facilitates make it suitable for this research.

In the thesis, I use narratives to give “voice” to my informants. Some of the voices that I choose to highlight are unique in some ways and highlight variations in women’s experiences, while some others bring to the fore more general concerns that

emerged in conversations with other informants as well. With the narratives, I provide the date on which the conversation took place. I introduce key (CRB and RB) informants interviewed in the text by providing their names (changed to ensure anonymity), details of their regional and caste identity and age [e.g. Usha (RB, 47, Jat)]. For CRMs that are inter-caste, I provide the caste of the husband [e.g. Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat)] as their own caste origins are obscure and hence they are merged into their husbands' castes (see Chapter Eight). I introduce other women informants by providing their name, age, caste and gender [e.g. Kavita (41, Jat, F)]. Likewise, for male informants, I provide their name, age, caste and gender [e.g. Rampal (87, Jat, M)].

Semi-structured interviews enabled me to pursue questions or issues that emerged from individual stories. As the research aims to capture lived experiences, I talked to key CRBs and RBs through repeat visits where I conducted small topic-based interviews. Repeat visits were also vital given the questions that this research seeks to address that deal with informants' private lives, and explores "sensitive" topics that made it essential to establish trust, comfort and rapport with informants. When I first met Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) she told me that her husband was *barīyā* [very good]. As I spent time with her over months, she talked to me about how difficult her life with her husband had been. "You cannot share *apnī bāt* [personal matters] with everyone", she said (10 February 2013). Renuka (CRB, 33, Chamar) told me on my sixth visit that she had previously been married in her native state. Until then, the reasons for her marriage in Barampur were not clear to me. She added that even her husband was not aware of her first marriage.

I interviewed some women through the course of the eleven months I spent in Barampur. There were informants like Kanchan (CRB, 21, Chamar), who was married in June 2012. I first met her in September 2012 at the start of my fieldwork, and in the course of it, I watched her adjust as a new bride, struggle to conceive a child, undergo fertility treatment and conceive. She gave birth a few weeks after I completed fieldwork in August 2013. "Being there" enabled me to understand how she lived the first year of her married life. As I talked to women about their experiences of married life, I became aware that in most accounts the concerns of the

present were dominant and “sorrowful matters were the most readily narrativised” (cf. Narayan 2004: 230). The first time I met her, Sheela (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) said: “I am telling you, there is no other woman as unhappy as me” (19 September 2012). Likewise, Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) told me: “Happiness was not in my destiny...” (30 January 2013).

Some informants were more open than others. I first met Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) in October 2012. In the course of the fieldwork she started calling me *dīdī* [older sister] and told me: “I have been troubled since I got married but when I met you, I did not say anything because I did not know you, now we have a relationship of friendship” (17 August 2013). The accounts of some, like Varsha, are thus more elaborate than others. This being a gender segregated context, public spaces were male spaces with women being confined to the domestic domain so I interviewed informants in their homes. I had conversations with male informants in their homes as well, as it was not appropriate for me to talk with men in the street or the *chaupāl* [courtyard].

Several issues that this research seeks to address could not be understood through interviews alone. Informal conversations with several people in the village, observation, gossip and rumour all served as additional sources of information. Informal conversations with family members of key informants at times revealed “multifaceted, cross-cutting and even diverging perspectives on the same episodes” (Narayan 2004: 245). I also gauged a lot of what at times remained unsaid through observing interactions, gestures and facial expressions.

Ethnography enables ethnographers to gain access to what Hammersley and Atkinson describe as “naturally occurring” oral accounts that are not produced by informants in response to the ethnographer’s questions but may be “unsolicited”. These are “a useful source of both direct information about the setting and evidence about the perspective concerns and discursive practices of people who produce them” (1983: 110). Similarly, Fine writes: “It is through gossip and rumour that one can gain what is, in effect, a map of the social environment in which one lives and works” (Fine in Sassatelli 2010: 82). Gossip and rumour thus serve as important sources of information as they provided an insight into the normative tenor of gender, caste and class relations in the village. It also became evident to me that there is some

information that informants would not reveal about themselves. At times, contradictory accounts of the same event emerged in conversations with different informants (as I discuss in the chapters that follow).

1.3. Selection of Respondents

As discussed earlier (see 1.2), I selected five castes (Jat, Chamar, Kumhar, Teli and Lohar) for intensive study. M.N. Srinivas defines dominant caste as follows:

A caste may be said to be ‘dominant’ when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power. A large and powerful caste can be more easily dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low. However, the above definition omits an element of dominance which is becoming increasingly important in rural India, namely, the number of educated persons in a caste and the occupations they pursue,...

(1987: 97)

Jats are the dominant caste of Barampur. They are dominant both numerically and in terms of landownership. In Barampur, with the exception of Jats, all caste groups are landless. Jats are a middle-ranking caste and in March 2014 they were included in the central list of Other Backward Castes (OBC).³ Significant numbers of Jats have accessed higher education and the percentage of Jats employed in government and private sector jobs is much higher compared to other castes (Sahay 2015). Chamars are a Dalit⁴ caste and are included in the category of Scheduled castes. The Chamars are numerically the second largest caste of Barampur and the largest Dalit caste in UP (Duncan 1999). Kumhars are an intermediate caste and the Telis and Lohars are the two numerically dominant Muslim castes of Barampur. Kumhars, Telis and Lohars are included in the central list of OBCs. One of the main reasons for selecting these castes was that men in each of them had married CRBs. Of the five Muslim castes in Barampur, I found CRBs only among the Lohars and Telis (though exceptional). Most Lohar households were economically better off than other Muslim caste households in the village.

³ The Indian Constitution entitles Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes to reservation in government employment and educational institutions

⁴ Dalit means “oppressed” and refers to the ex-untouchable castes.

The choice of these castes for intensive study was also influenced by the focus in the existing academic literature on Hindu upper-caste marriage practices. The reasons for including Muslim castes were threefold: *First*, UP is one of the Indian states with a significant Muslim population – 18.5 per cent (Census of India 2001). *Second*, some studies point to the presence of CRBs among Muslim castes as well (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Kukreja and Kumar 2013; Singh 2009). In Barampur, however, the commonly held opinion was that Muslim men were not facing difficulties in finding wives and cases of CRM were exceptional among them. This was an aspect I wished to explore. *Third*, I wanted to examine how membership in a religious community apart from caste shapes women's lived experiences.

Within each of the five castes, I carried out interviews with RBs and CRBs. Table 1.2 shows the number of RB and CRB informants interviewed per caste. As mentioned earlier (see Introduction) for the purpose of this study, RM includes dowryless marriages and inter-caste marriages negotiated within the “acceptable” marriage distance (see 2.1). Yet my selection of key RB informants did not include women who were married without a dowry or whose caste status was unknown. In Barampur, there was only one CRB among the Telis and Lohars each and I interviewed both. I found the largest number of CRBs among the Chamars (28) and thus I choose the highest number of CRBs to interview within the Chamars. Problems of access to CRB informants, particularly among the Jats (see 1.4) had a bearing on the number of informants whom I selected for interviewing per caste. The selection of CRBs and RBs was intended to provide a comparison of lived experiences of CRBs and RBs but also of women across castes.

Women's location in domestic structures is altered over time and women do not “experience their daily lives from the same vantage point” (Jeffery and Jeffery 1996: 19). Apart from caste, then, I used years of marriage (less than 10, 20, 30, over 30) rather than age as a variable in selection to examine women's experiences at different stages of their married lives. I did not use age as a variable as women of about the same age were often at very different stages. Abha and Aarti, for instance, were both Chamar and in their mid 20s. Abha had been married for 11 years and was a widow, while Aarti had been married for only three years.

Table 1.2: Key informants Interviewed

Caste	CRB	RB
Jat	4	5
Kumhar	4	4
Chamar	9	5
Teli	1	2
Lohar	1	3

Talking to elderly informants provided insights not only on how their position within domestic hierarchies changed over time but also on their relationships with their mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Conversations with new brides, on the other hand, helped me understand the vulnerabilities that women experienced when they first moved to live in their *sasurāl* [in-laws' home], that older informants also talked about (see 5.1).

In selecting RBs, I attempted to match them with CRBs who were similar in terms of years of marriage, marital status (married/widowed) and caste. Koyal (RB, 16) and Kanchan (CRB, 21), both Chamar, for example, were married in June 2012 (three months prior to the start of my fieldwork). In the course of my fieldwork, I observed the different trajectories their lives followed. I also chose RB and CRB informants who were in relation of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and shared a household. As far as class or economic status were concerned, most CRBs were married to poor men (casual labourers, landless or those with marginal holdings) and most of the RBs informants selected were from similar economic backgrounds. This research, thus, discusses some of the key issues of experience in marriage, particularly for those in poverty. Some of the RB informants among the Jats and Lohars, however, belonged to families that were economically better off and had higher levels of education and this helped me gain an understanding of how these factors impacted women's lived experiences.

Each of my key informants was either a RB or CRB, belonged to a caste/religious and class group and was at a particular stage of her married life. This enabled me to

address how women's differential social location shaped their experiences of marriage. I used the same sets of questions in interviews with CRBs and RBs. Yet, some issues were specific to CRM (see Chapter Eight) and therefore I had an additional set of questions for them.

1.4. The Role of Facilitators and Gaining of Access

In this section, I reflect on the process of gaining access in a hierarchical caste and gender segregated society. Ethnographers have challenged static notions of the insider/outsider dichotomy and argued instead for insider and outsider status as shifting and constantly in process of negotiation (e.g. Zubair et al. 2012). In Barampur, it was necessary for me to conform to conceptions of what was appropriate within this cultural context for even though, by virtue of my urban, middle-class background, I was an outsider, I was not a western researcher. As an Indian and a north Indian woman, I could not get away with flouting local norms. Zubair et al. discuss how a researcher often has to learn to adapt his/her bodily performances and actions – including the way he/she dresses, walks and moves in order to be accepted by those who are being researched (2012: 3.2; See also Okely 2007).

I dressed “modestly” in traditional Indian clothes wearing *salwār suit* with a *dupattā*. My clothing choices were appreciated by informants and they compared me with and criticised young women who had started wearing jeans (“western” clothing) in the village. As an unmarried woman, I was often questioned by women about when I would marry. I could not be honest with them and say that I might not marry at all. Instead I had to respond in ways that were appropriate in the context I was working in. I did not want to be dishonest with my informants and this was an ethical dilemma I faced throughout the course of my fieldwork. Yet I made the choice to do so bearing in mind the need to ensure my safety and to become acceptable to those I was researching.

As an outsider, owing to my urban status, I could walk around the village, unlike young village women. Yet my age, gender and marital status made it necessary for me to be chaperoned. Ethnographers have highlighted “some of the problems and

consequences inherent in the interaction of ethnographer and subjects” in a “...tightly closed and highly stratified society” focusing on the implications of the differential status of facilitators/assistants with regard to acceptance by different groups within a village community (see Berreman 1972: xix). In the following pages, I reflect on how the gender and caste status of those who chaperoned me influenced my access to informants and the information I was able to collect.

I started my work among the Chamars with Satender (55, Chamar, M), who had acted as the facilitator during my earlier fieldwork by providing an introduction to informants. He was one of the few men of his generation with an undergraduate degree. I benefitted from his perspective on various matters and he provided me with a wealth of information. As he was male, the advantage was that he stayed away while I talked with women due to *pardā* [veiling/seclusion] restrictions. The fact that he was a man and I an unmarried woman did not create problems when I moved around among the Chamars as he was well-known and respected in his community. I conformed to what was regarded as appropriate in this context, always walking behind him, as men and women did not walk together. Satender’s insider status in the Chamar community had distinct advantages but at times it also posed problems as I had to avoid some informants because they had tense relationships with his family. There were occasions when informants tried to get information from me about his family and some people became hostile as I refused to divulge information.

Satender could not act as facilitator in other castes as he was not known there and having him accompany me would have provoked gossip about me walking around with an unrelated man. Further, due to his caste (Chamar) status he could not provide entry into other castes as became evident when I visited the household of a Brahmin priest. Satender sat outside while I talked to the priest. To gain an entry into other castes, I needed to find a Jat facilitator and ideally a woman. Yet it seemed difficult, as most families would not permit in-married women to chaperon me around the village, given *pardā* restrictions.

Three months into the fieldwork, with the help of the Jat family I lived with, I was introduced to an *āshā* [government appointed health worker] and she agreed to help me with the village survey and was to act as my chaperon for the rest of my

fieldwork. In the course of carrying out the survey, however, some women told me that she had been telling women not to share anything with me about their private lives which proved to be counterproductive. My Jat landlady then introduced me to Rani (35, Jat, F), who agreed to chaperon me if I paid her an hourly wage. I agreed to do so. Rani's husband was suffering from an illness and was unable to work. She told me that in different circumstances she would not have left the house to work. As others in the village were aware of her situation, no one gossiped about her.

I tried to talk with women alone and the advantage of having a woman chaperon was that she kept other women (mothers-in-law, neighbours etc.) away by engaging them in conversation. This was a problem I faced when I was accompanied by Satender. Women always gathered around and tried to listen in on conversations. In such situations, I tried to engage them in the conversation or continued to talk to my RB/CRB informants on routine matters such as where their *pīhar* [natal home] was, what they cooked that day etc. Eventually women who had gathered around lost interest and left.

Rani helped me gain entry not only into Jat households but she also introduced me to women of other castes who worked in her husband's fields as agricultural labourers. Some of my key informant women also introduced me to other women of their caste. I familiarised myself with some people while carrying out the village survey. I found it difficult to gain an entry among the Muslim castes and it was only in April 2013, six months into my fieldwork, that I was introduced to some Lohar and Teli families by Kavita (41, Jat, F), an *anganwādī* worker [government appointed health worker]. Due to time constraints and the difficulties I faced in gaining access, I did not hang around in the parts of the village where Muslim households were concentrated. I, thus, did not have access to as many informal conversations, rumour and gossip as I did among the Hindu castes. My understanding of the Muslim castes to some extent is limited although I did manage to carry out in-depth interviews with Muslim CRBs and RBs.

My own gender, as also that of my chaperon, presented difficulties with regard to gaining access to male informants. I recall several failed attempts to meet the *panchayat* [local government institution] secretary. I was told that he was visiting the

village headman on a particular day. I could not go there by myself, however, and nor could I ask Rani to accompany me as being a Jat daughter-in-law of the village she had to observe avoidance with older males. My landlady's husband escorted me to the village headman's *gher* [cattle shed]. As I sat there among five men, I felt very conscious of being a woman in a male space. While my gender made it possible for me to enter into the lives of women, something that a male researcher could not have done in this context, it made it impossible for me to talk to young men. I could speak with older male informants but only in the presence of other people and there were certain questions that I could not ask. Reflecting on her work in rural Punjab (north India) Chopra writes:

The problem of knowing and the subversion of the knowing are particularly acute in segregated societies...which have well-articulated separate spheres/domains of men and women. The outsider-anthropologist may transgress gender boundaries; but equally there are ways in which gender intervenes to block the process of knowing...whole arenas of life were literally invisible to me. My gender had everything to do with what I could know.

(2004: 37)

I was aware that being Indian, my own caste status might have a bearing on the relations I would be able to develop in the field. During the initial months, I was constantly questioned about my caste. I succeeded in avoiding the question on most occasions. Chamar informants in particular were confused: "She lives in a Jat household but she eats with Chamars". On one occasion a Jat man told me: "I saw you once with a Chamar woman, I thought to myself, she could not be a *Chamārī*, because you do not look like a Chamar woman" (22 October 2012). Some people became hostile. One woman, for instance, remarked: "She cannot be trusted, she does not say what her caste is" (23 October 2012).

I also faced several difficulties in gaining access to key RB and CRB informants of different castes. It was extremely difficult to talk to women who lived in joint households unless their *sās* [mother-in-law] consented. In nuclear households, some women said that they would talk to me only if I asked their husbands for permission. Some refused to talk because they were afraid that if their husbands or in-laws heard of what they had talked about they would be beaten up. I visited my key informants

over time, building rapport and establishing trust, yet some like Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) had been afraid to tell me, in her words, “the whole truth” until my last visit before I concluded fieldwork. She told me:

I told you only half the story. Sometimes I would think, I should tell you my story – the whole story but then I thought you cannot tell someone *apnī bāt* [what is personal]. What if someone heard and told my husband and then he beat me up? I told you that my only problem was that my natal family was not with me but what I did not say was that I have been very unhappy...my husband is not nice....he used to beat me a lot...

(11 March 2013)

For the first time Kalawati continued to tell me about her relationship with her husband. She felt safe as my departure meant that talking to me would not cause her any harm. Some were unwilling to talk because they felt that I had been there before (my previous fieldwork) and taken information, wasted their time and they did not benefit from it in any way. Many were non-literate and it was extremely difficult to explain to them that I was there for the purpose of research and that I could not help them in return monetarily or in any other way. At times, I was approached by informants for help with filling out applications (e.g. for widow pensions) that I agreed to do and that made them open to talk to me, but there were other times when they asked for help (e.g. that involved talking to the village headman for a ration card) that I could not interfere with and then informants refused to talk.

Some women were willing to talk yet could not because others in their household were unhappy about my repeat visits, “she comes everyday”, Sudha’s (16, Chamar, F) *jethānī* [HeBW] remarked and the next time I returned to talk with Sudha, I was sent away (11 October 2012). There were some like Kanchan’s (CRB, 21, Chamar) *jethānī* who tried creating problems by telling other women to be wary of me as I was a reporter. At times, my attempt at talking to women alone also presented difficulties. Some people were suspicious of my motivations and I was constantly questioned about why Rani sat outside. On one occasion, I heard Kanchan’s *jethānī* [HeBW] say to other women, “she talks to women alone to get them to say bad things about their husbands” (27 September 2012). I made an attempt to assure her that this was not the case and explain to her the purpose of my stay in the village. Yet

she remained hostile and the next time I returned to talk to Kanchan, I was told that she was unwell and could not talk. At times, women themselves became disinterested in talking after my first or second visit, “you have already asked everything”, they said. Some were hostile for reasons I could not comprehend and they even asked Rani not to help me. On one occasion, I was stopped by a Jat woman who said: “Do you not have any shame, talking to women about such things” (11 October 2012). I was not clear on what she thought “such things” were or whether she was suggesting that as an unmarried woman it was not appropriate for me to talk to married women.

In their work with rural women, some researchers have pointed to the immense difficulties of talking to women about their sexual lives (e.g. see Jeffery and Jeffery 1996: 127). I had anticipated that my unmarried status would present additional difficulties. I approached the issue by asking women about choice with regard to number of children. I was surprised at the ease with which some women talked to me about sexual relations with husbands. Yet I wondered whether the way many spoke about it, suggesting that they neither felt desire nor pleasure (see 6.2), was for some a way to appear respectable and instruct me on what was acceptable as pre-marital sex was taboo. I was aware that when women sat together they talked about their sexual lives, but these were conversations I did not ever have access to.

My gender and marital status presented other problems as well. I visited Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) several times during the course of my fieldwork. On one occasion my landlady asked me to stop going to Varsha’s house as those in the neighbourhood were gossiping about me saying I was having a relationship with not one but both of her unmarried *devars* [HyB]. Interestingly, her *devars* both migrated out for work and I had never visited Varsha when they returned to Barampur. I did not visit Varsha for more than a month as my landlady requested.

Getting access to CRBs was difficult, particularly among the Jats. Due to status concerns, Jat informants either denied that Jat men had brought CRBs (see 3.2) or I was not allowed by family members to talk to them. The first time I went with my survey form to Varsha’s (CRB, 28, Jat) house she told me to visit at 4 p.m. on a weekday as her mother-in-law took her children out during that time. While I found a

way to talk with Varsha, there were others I did not have the opportunity to speak with.

I was also warned that talking to some CRBs among the Jats could jeopardise my safety. On one occasion as I walked around, I saw a woman standing in the courtyard of her household. I could tell she was a CRB. I started a conversation with her and she said she was from Meghalaya (north-east India). Then her husband came out and in a threatening tone asked me not to return or talk to his wife. I heard from their neighbours that her husband had paid a “huge sum of money” for her but no one knew how she came to Barampur or who brought her. I was told that she was not allowed to speak to anyone in the village.

I faced difficulties in gaining access to CRBs among other castes as well. Faiza (CRB, late 40s, Lohar) talked with me openly the first time I met her. She had consented to my using my digital recorder during the interview. Two days later, I saw Faiza at the village market. She looked afraid and told me that her husband had fought with her after I left, saying that I had recorded the conversation and I would use it to get them arrested. I tried to reassure Faiza that this was not the case. I asked my landlady’s husband, who was known to Faiza’s husband, to speak to him to assure him that I had been staying at their home for six months and was in the village only for the purpose of research and would not cause any harm to them. I had spoken to Faiza’s husband the first time I went to their household and asked for his consent to speak to her as she had requested, yet my presence had created problems for her. I did not return to their household following this.

Similarly, the first time I met Sita (CRB, mid 40s, Chamar) she talked to me about how she had been “deceived” and brought to Barampur. The next day when I returned to the Chamar neighbourhood, Satender (my chaperon) told me that Sita had told other women that I would help her to run away. She possibly felt vulnerable, thinking that she had revealed information to a stranger. Due to this, I was forced to stay away from the Chamar neighbourhood for some time. Some CRBs themselves were reluctant. Deepa (CRB, mid-30s, Kumhar) had acted as the go-between for several marriages. She sent me away with some excuse every time I visited her home. She told Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar), her *jethānī* [HeBW], that I might

report to the police about her because I might think that she brings women from Jharkhand and sells them. It was becoming evident to me that CRBs or their families were at times unwilling to talk because of the assumption that CRMs entailed bride-buying and were regarded as lower forms of marriage (see Chapter Three). Despite the aforementioned problems, though, I did succeed in gathering rich ethnographic data that enabled me to write about women's lived experiences in Barampur.

1.5. Data Recording and Analysis

I recorded the data gathered through interviews, observation and informal conversations through note taking in field diaries as well as through the use of a digital recorder (in cases where respondents consented). I conversed with respondents in Hindi (the spoken language) but took notes in English noting only colloquial phrases/terms in Hindi. I transcribed the recorded interviews and translated them into English. For recorded interviews, I also made notes of my observations in my field diary after I returned from the interview. I attempted to transcribe interviews the same day or week, as further questions emerged in listening to the recordings that I pursued in my next visit with informants. I also attempted to type out the notes in the field diaries on a computer the same day that the interviews were conducted. After every two to three weeks, I spent a few days away from the field completing the transcription, reflecting on the data and making analytical notes.

For the village survey, I used printed questionnaires that I filled out. I entered the survey data on a computer using Microsoft Excel. I started the data analysis process by reading and re-reading the field notes and interview transcripts and developing indexing categories and themes that emerged from the material. I then coded the data using the Atlas.ti software. As mentioned earlier (see 1.2), in the thesis I give "voice" to my informants by using quotations from interviews. Due to considerations of word limit, I present most in English, retaining only some terms, phrases and sentences in Hindi to capture the nuance of what was said that may have been lost in translation. For Hindi terms and sentences, I provide the English translation in square brackets. As for transliteration, the Hindi long **a** has been marked as **ā**, the long **i** as **ī** and the long **u** as **ū**.

1.6. Ethics

My research followed the guidelines outlined in the Statement of Ethical Practice by the British Sociological Association and the Research Ethics Framework of the College of Humanities and Social Science, University of Edinburgh (which comply with the ESRC Research Ethics Framework).⁵

1.6.1. Informed Consent

I gained consent from all informants after explaining the purpose of my research to them in their spoken language. I secured oral consent as many of my informants were non-literate. Also, from my earlier fieldwork I was aware that making them sign a written consent form may have frightened them and made them reluctant to talk. I told participants that the research aims to understand married women's experiences of everyday life. Stating that the research aims to compare the lived experiences of women in RM and CRM may have influenced the responses of informants. Whilst I could not conceal my interest in interviewing CRBs, as I interviewed RBs as well as a range of other informants in the village, I was able to avoid a situation where CRBs or their family members felt that they were being singled out (although as I discussed in 1.4, some refused to be interviewed).

I told informants that they were free to withdraw consent at any stage of the research, especially if pressurised by husbands or family members, and they could refuse to answer questions that they did not feel comfortable with. They were aware that I was noting down the information they provided in a field diary and I used the digital recorder only if they consented. I also clarified to informants that the information I collected was solely for the purpose of research and they would not be compensated monetarily for their participation. In an ethnographic study it is at times difficult to secure consent, for instance, when data are gathered through informal conversations, rumour and observation for "unlike experimental researchers, ethnographers typically

⁵ Available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Framework_for_Research_Ethics_tcm8-4586.pdf [Accessed March 29, 2012].

have limited control over who enters the field of observation” (Murphy and Dingwall 2001: 342).

Also, as Bourgois notes, “Technically, to maintain truly informed consent we should interrupt conversation and activities... to remind everyone that everything they say or do may be recorded in fieldwork notes” (2007: 297). Bearing this in mind, at times I took fieldnotes during informal conversations and ensured that on every occasion I met someone new I introduced myself and explained why I was in the village. I became aware of the difficulties with regard to informed consent when I talked with my landlady. For me, she was a vital source of information. It was impossible to demarcate boundaries between when fieldwork was going on and when it ended, since every conversation we had provided information.

There are guidelines with regard to securing consent from minors. Some of my key informants were married women and were below 18 years (common in rural India) and hence minors. I secured consent in culturally appropriate forms. Even though minors, I secured consent from the women themselves but also from their husbands and in-laws, as I did for many other informants bearing in mind gender and domestic hierarchies.

1.6.2. Anonymity, Confidentiality and Avoiding Harm

As this research deals with informants’ private lives, I took measures to ensure confidentiality. Kamlesh (RB, late 20s, Kumhar) told me: “If my husband knew that I was talking to you about this, he would kill me” (17 March 2013). I made all attempts to ensure that women were not exposed to potential harm by not letting it be known to husbands or family members that women were disclosing information about their private lives. This was also crucial to ensure my own safety in the village as I could not let it be known that I was talking to women about this. As I mention in 1.4, I ensured my physical safety by being chaperoned. Additionally, I also made the difficult decision of lying to my informants about my age. Being in the field, I was also exposed to gossip concerning illegal activities (e.g. about families who had paid bribes, women who were trafficked), reporting which may not only have placed informants in a vulnerable position but also jeopardised my safety. Also, as per the

ethical guidelines in a different context, I may have had to report matters such as domestic violence and child marriage. In this context, though it was meaningless mainly for two reasons. *First*, there are no appropriate authorities to report to and the structure of State protection of vulnerable groups in India is very different from that in Britain. *Second*, more importantly, in this context women do not have the option or support structures to leave marriage (see 7.4). Reporting marital violence, for instance, would have only exposed them to further problems.

I also ensured that the facilitators did not try to influence, control and observe the research or have access to information. I ensured that anonymity was maintained through the removal of identifiers and the use of pseudonyms for respondents and places. I will ensure that publications do not mention the real names of the participants or the study village. I ensured that anonymity was safeguarded at the stage of data storage: I stored the data on a computer that is password protected as well as on encrypted local disks on a hard drive. I stored the hard copy materials (field diaries) in a secure location.

1.6.3. Psychological Stress and Discomfort

I ensured that I had established relationships of trust and that informants felt comfortable before I approached subjects that would be difficult for them to talk about. I spent my first few visits talking to informants about routine matters. I was unsure how I would approach women about topics that I thought might be difficult for them (e.g. domestic violence) and whether it would come up in conversation without my asking. Often it did. I felt apprehensive that I might leave women distressed. When I talked to women, some talked about being beaten as one of the things that occurred during the day, some seemed unmoved when they talked and at times I found myself more disturbed than them. Women were particularly distressed about illness, poverty and debt, the conflicts they had with their in-laws or how much they (CRBs) missed their natal families. Researchers have drawn attention to the “therapeutic effect of talking” with interviewing providing a “valuable outlet for the verbalisation of feelings” (Oakley 1981: 50). Women often told me how they never talked to anyone about their problems for fear that it may become known to others. I felt that my status as an outsider and the relationships we had established encouraged

them to talk with me as they did not feel judged or afraid that their husbands or in-laws might learn about the information they had disclosed to me.

The initial fieldwork period was very distressing for me. I remember talking to women and returning to my landlady's disturbed. Yet due to considerations of confidentiality, I could not speak with anyone while I was in the field. For this reason, I left the field every ten days to two weeks and returned home in Delhi. This was also one reason why my fieldwork in Barampur took longer than anticipated. Gradually as the months passed, I found that I had developed a coping mechanism and at times I felt unaffected by things that had initially been very disturbing. When I returned to Edinburgh after completing fieldwork, however, I struggled with everything that I had not/could not deal with while I was in the field and I had to seek counselling. It was only after three months of returning that I was able to start the writing process.

Conclusion

I have described how ethnography in a village in rural north India, with a significant number of CRBs whose post-marital experiences could be compared with RBs enabled me to gather the data to address my research questions. A village survey, interviews (structured and semi-structured), observation, rumour and gossip were used to collect information. I discuss the role that the caste status and gender of facilitators played in gaining entry and access to informants. I reflect on how my positionality – urban background, gender, caste and unmarried status – shaped my research experience. I made efforts to become acceptable to those I was researching by dressing appropriately and being chaperoned. I followed ethical guidelines for research by informing participants about the purpose of the research and securing their consent. I made efforts to ensure that the research did not cause harm to informants by maintaining confidentiality. The names of all informants and the study village have been anonymised. I describe how talking to women on difficult subjects also affected me while I was in the field and during the writing process, and how I found ways to cope with it. I have attempted to overcome the challenges I faced in the course of fieldwork as far as possible and to collect data that enabled me to address my research questions that I present in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER TWO: MAKING A REGIONAL MARRIAGE

A marriage is articulated as more than an ongoing relationship between two individuals. It establishes a tie between two social groups such as family-households, lineages, or clans and, at times, reiterates an already existing tie between them...In other words, marriage is an alliance in structuralist and political terms, entailing affinal relations.

(Palriwala and Kaur 2014: 4)

Introduction

In this chapter, I address: What is a regional marriage (RM)? I outline what is regarded as the desired, prestigious or normatively “correct” form of marriage within this regional context but also I discuss other forms that are considered lesser ways of marrying. I begin by discussing the “rules” observed in the negotiation of marriage and the intermediaries or matchmakers involved. I then explore whether there has been a change over time with regard to choice on the part of young men and women in decisions concerning their marriages. In the last part of the chapter, I discuss marriage payments, with a focus on dowry as the honourable form and its role in establishing and maintaining affinal relations between two social groups. Additionally, I describe other practices such as dowryless marriages and payments to the parents of the bride that exist alongside the practice of dowry although locally regarded as demeaning.

2.1. The “Rules” of Marriage

As per north Indian marriage norms, marriages among Hindus in Barampur were arranged within the caste (were endogamous) and followed norms of *gotrā* [clan/descendants from a common ancestor] exogamy. In the past, most castes observed the four-*gotrā* rule that prohibited marriage between a man and woman who shared any of the *gotrās* of their father, mother or father’s mother or mother’s mother. During my fieldwork, however, informants said that this rule was now relaxed with only the father’s and mother’s *gotrā* being excluded for the purpose of marriage. They did not specify when exactly this shift took place but spoke of it as a response to the difficulties confronted by men with regard to finding brides (see 3.2.1).

The norm of *gotrā* exogamy was extended to the village or *guwand* [neighbouring villages or those under a *khāp* – clan territory]. Those born within the same village were regarded as “brothers” and “sisters” having to observe norms of brotherhood or *bhaichārā* (see also Madsen 1991; Pradhan 1961). A violation of *gotrā* and village norms was, thus, considered to be a violation of the rule of incest. In north India, incest is a wide category that includes all inhabitants of a village, all *gotrās* represented in the village that may be located anywhere, as well as inhabitants of those villages which share a boundary with it, by creating a fictive brother-sister relationship between them (Chowdhry 2007: 123). Marriages that transgressed these norms were punished, often through the use of violence (see 8.1). Rampal (87, Jat, M) explained that *gotrā*, *gāon* [village] and *guwand* [neighbouring villages] had to be excluded for the purpose of marriage:

All Jats in Barampur belong to the Tomar *gotrā*. There are 84 Tomar villages that are placed under one *khāp* [clan territory] in the Meerut, Muzzafarnagar [neighbouring districts] and Baghpat region. Marriage cannot be arranged in any of these villages. Those of the Balyan *gotrā* cannot marry in 84 Balyan villages but we can marry there. We can also marry in the 54 Malik villages. There are some bordering villages where the *gotrā* is different yet we cannot marry there as they fall under the *guwand*. Although now marriages are being arranged in some of these villages. My wife’s *gotrā* is Dhākhā. There are five Dhākhā villages so my children can neither marry in these five villages nor in the 84 Tomar villages.

(29 July 2013)

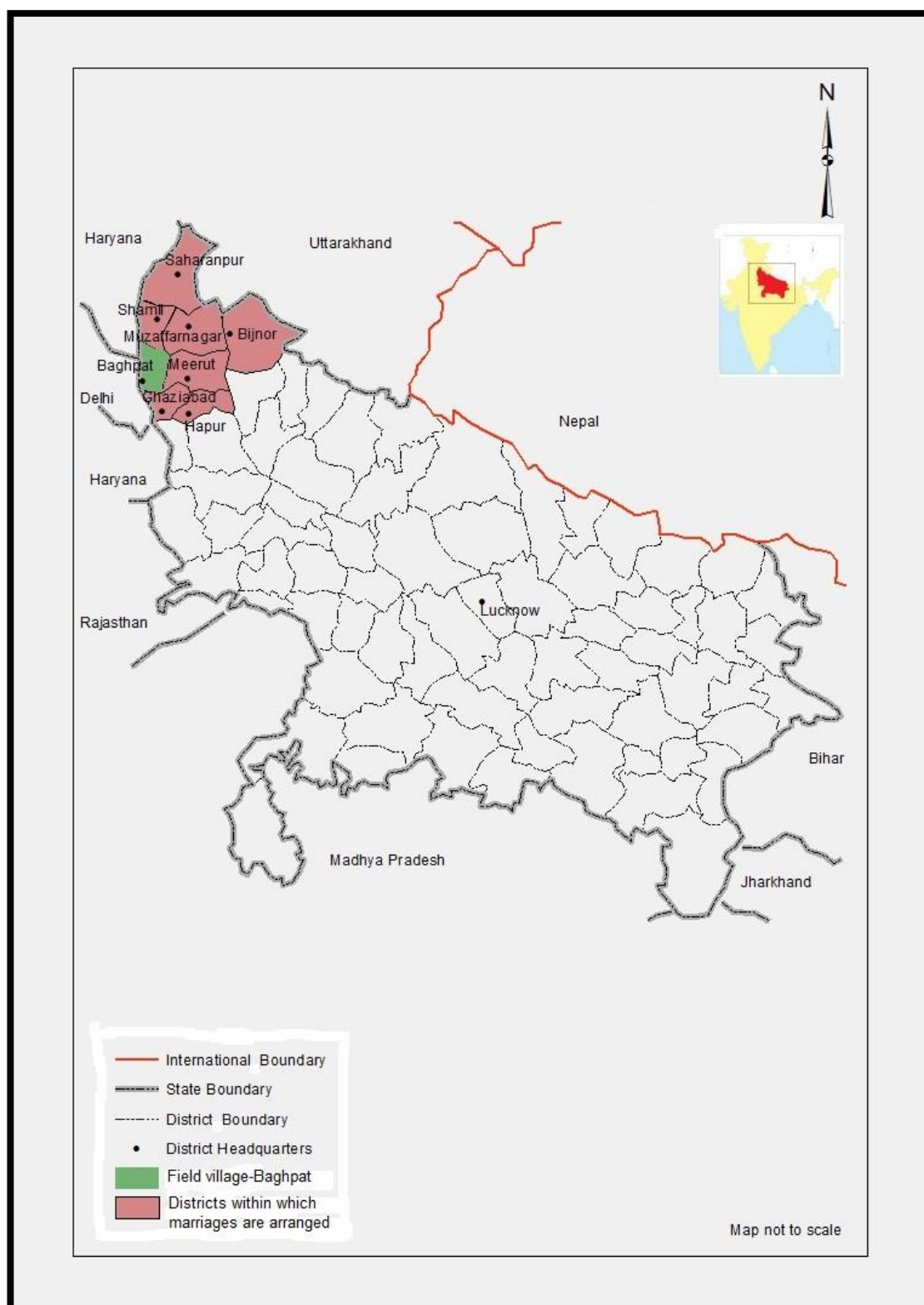
Marriage among Muslims in Barampur were also caste endogamous. They did not, however, have *gotrā* and marriage was permitted with relatives as noted by other studies on Muslims in South Asia (Donnan 1988; Jacobson 1976; Jeffery 1979, Jeffery et al. 1989; Vatuk 2014). “*Mā kā dūdh bachnā chāhiye*”, informants told me indicating that marriage was only prohibited between those having the same mother or those who had shared the milk of any woman and became milk-siblings. Close-kin marriage, however, was not the norm among Muslims in Barampur and some informants stated that marriages with outsiders were preferred by their families. Muneera (RB, 32, Lohar) explained: “If my *pīhar* [natal home] was also in Barampur, my parents would hear everything that happened in my *sasurāl* [in-law’s home]” (16 June 2013).

Jeffery (1979) noted that intra-village marriages were favoured among Muslims in Nizamuddin but in their work in Bijnor district, UP they found that intra-village marriages were less common and not preferred by men and women alike (see Jeffery et al. 1989). In Barampur Muslims, like Hindus, observed the norm of village exogamy. Post-marital residence across castes was patri-virilocal, with the woman leaving her natal home and village to live at her husband's/in-law's home. For Hindus and Muslims alike, while norms of village/territorial exogamy were followed, marriages were arranged within a limited geographical region – within the district or into another (neighbouring) district but within UP (see Appendix Three).

According to my village survey data on 638 married couples, daughters/sisters were married into and wives came from villages within Baghpat or in the districts of Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Shamli, Saharanpur, Ghaziabad, Baghpat, Hapur and Bijnor (see map 2.1). Daughters were also married in districts in Haryana, but informants said that they were married into families that had migrated from villages in western UP districts. Based on village studies, scholars show that marriages are generally arranged within a 25 km radius (Agarwal 1994: 379-389; Libbee 1980) with the exception of the upper castes such as the Brahmins and Rajputs who typically marry over longer distances (Gould 1960; Parry 1979; Plunkett 1973). More recent studies, however, point to an expansion of marriage distance and an increase in village exogamous marriages (Mazumdar and Agnihotri 2013). According to my village survey, the marriage distance for women in RM varied from 3-154 kms.

Scholars note a tendency towards hypergamy amongst castes in north India (Dumont [1970], 1980; Karve [1953], 1994). In this pattern, the daughter “marries up” with there being a slight inferiority of the wife's family in relation to the husband's but this in no way contravenes caste endogamy. This pattern corresponds with the Brahmanical-classical and universal ideology of *kanyādān* – a girl's marriage being a “gift of a maiden/virgin” with no payment received in return.

Map 2.1: Districts within which Regional Marriages are Arranged



Dumont writes:

The gift in general is an extremely meritorious action... “gift of a maiden” is a special form of gift, and it is meritorious on condition that no payment is received for the girl; here the girl is, on the whole, assimilated to a material good, and the giving of her is in fact accompanied by material gifts...

(1980: 117)

Studies on north India note hypergamy among ranked clans (Parry 1979) or economic status and *gotrā* operating as conflicting components of hypergamy within the caste (Khare 1960) or directional hypergamy with brides being given in a northerly or westerly direction (Marriot 1955). In Barampur, only the Jats observed hypergamy. There was no hierarchy among Jat clans as Gupta noted: “Jats prize the ethic of equality above all else, it is not possible to pull rank among them” (1997: 42; see also Madsen 1991). Thus, marriages were hypergamous in the sense that women married into families of higher economic status. Unlike the Jats, Chamar, Kumhar, Teli and Lohar informants pointed out that daughters were married into families of more or less equal status – they were isogamous. Marrying “up” meant high demands for dowry, the predominant form of marriage payment in Barampur (see 2.4.1). While families negotiated isogamous marriages, the giving of dowry and gifts in one direction following marriage made the relationship between wife-givers and wife-takers hypergamous, as I discuss further in Chapter Seven. As Vatuk noted, “the existence of the marital alliance itself establishes the superiority of the bride-takers...independent of the relative position of the two families in terms of economic assets, prestige, and local reputation” (1975: 159).

Exchange marriages (see 3.3.1) involving the exchange of spouses between two or more families is regarded as conflicting with the ideal of *kanyādān* [“gift of a maiden” without accepting anything in return] and the norm of hypergamous marriage (cf. Milner 1988). Studies draw attention to how exchange marriage is differently viewed by different castes. The high castes generally do not approve of this form of marriage while it is considered an acceptable form among the lower castes (Das 1975). The Gujars of western UP avoid exchange marriage as it suggests “taking a bride for a price” (Raheja 1988: 120), while the Brahmins (though an upper caste) in parts of Gujarat practised a form of exchange marriage (Veen 1973; see also

Madan 2002 for reciprocal marriages among the Pandits of Kashmir). In Barampur, forms of exchange marriage were taking place among the Chamars and Kumhars. Although acceptable as they conformed to caste and community norms and entailed dowry, these marriages were regarded not as *nirol* [i.e., the ideal form of marriage] but as lesser marriages (see Chapter Three).

According to the 2001 Census data for Baghpat district (rural), the mean age at marriage for men was 20.25 and for women 17.6 (C – Series: Social and Cultural Tables, Census of India 2001). During my fieldwork, informants talked of a rise in age at marriage with there being a change from the earlier practice of *shādī* [wedding] at an early age and *gaunā* [co-habitation] a few years later. For Bijnor [neighbouring district] in the early 1990s, Jeffery and Jeffery (1996) noted that cohabitation did not take place until the couple were 16 or 17, with most weddings taking place six months or a year before cohabitation. In Barampur, the gap between wedding and *gaunā* no longer existed. It is difficult to establish when this change took place, as some informants married for less than 10 years said that they came to Barampur at *gaunā*.

In Chapter One, I pointed out the difficulties in gathering age at marriage data, so it is difficult to draw on the survey data to establish the average age at marriage for men and women. Informants said that daughters were generally married between 18-22 years. Among the Jats, as women were pursuing higher education, some were getting married in their mid-20s. Informants said that men were usually married in their early to mid-20s. They explained that an unmarried man below the age of 30 years was referred to as *kuwārā* [marriageable]. Once he reached 35 years, he was considered to have passed the “appropriate” age for marriage and the term *randwā* was used to indicate his never-married status.⁶

For all the Hindu castes, the wedding ceremony was conducted by a Brahmin priest, apart from the two Scheduled castes in the village – Valmiki and Chamars who had a caste member perform the ceremony. The wedding rituals entailed filling

⁶ The term *randwā* is used for widowers. The term used for widow is *rānd* but this is also a verbal abuse that means whore. While *randwā* did not have similar connotations, it was nonetheless a derogatory term that came to express pity for men who remained never-married and had hence failed to achieve social adulthood.

vermillion in the parting of the bride's hair and an exchange of garlands. The *pherā* [circling the sacred fire], however, was regarded as the most important ritual in the ceremony and was described as essential for a marriage to be legitimised as a marriage by the caste and village community. Other rituals such as worshipping the *kul devtā* [clan god] that followed the wedding were a prerequisite to consummating the marriage. Among Muslims, a religious specialist was called in to conduct the *nikāh* [Muslim marriage ceremony]. Both the boy and girl were asked if they consent and a *nikāhnāmā* [Marriage contract] was produced as evidence.⁷

2.2. Who arranges? The Matchmaker or *Bīcholiā*

In their work in Bijnor, Jeffery et al. (1989) noted that among Muslims it was the groom's parents who approached a prospective bride's family with a marriage proposal (see also Jeffery 1979). In Barampur, however, across castes (Hindu and Muslim alike) it was the accepted practice for the woman's family to approach a prospective groom's family with a marriage proposal. First a woman's father and/or male relatives visited the prospective groom's household and viewed him. During my fieldwork, informants pointed out that there had been a change from the earlier practice where the bride was not shown to the prospective groom's relatives. The new practice was that following a visit from the bride's relatives, the groom's relatives visited the prospective bride's family. The match was formalised with the bride's father giving cash to the groom described as *roknā*. This used to be a token payment as Rampal (87, Jat, M) explained: "*ek rupayā kī shādī*" [formalised with the payment of one rupee] (29 July 2013). The time period between *roknā* and wedding varied between informants, depending mainly on the family's financial situation, from a few days to months up to a year. During my fieldwork, I observed that the *roknā* was followed by a *sagāī* [engagement] with the bride's father giving cash and gifts to the groom and the groom's kin to the bride, with those given by the bride's family exceeding those given by the groom's.

⁷ In local usage, *larkā* [boy] and *larkī* [girl] are used to refer to all unmarried men and women. This reflects the importance of marriage in transition to social adulthood and highlights the significance of the inability to marry.

In north India, marriages are mediated through networks of kin and affines (Palriwala 1994) “for people will not make a marriage with families about which they know nothing and the information runs along kinship channels” (Mayer 1960: 4). Several studies have noted a decline in the role of traditional matchmakers (Majumdar 2004), a weakening of caste and kin networks in marriage negotiation (Shukla and Kapadia 2007) and the emergence of new modes of marriage arrangements such as marriage fairs (Pache 1998) and newspaper and internet matrimonial advertisements (Chauhan 2007; Kaur and Dhanda 2014; Sharangpani 2010). In Barampur, Satender (55, Chamar, M) mentioned visiting a marriage bureau in the nearest town that charged a fee of ₹5000 to arrange a second marriage for his daughter. This marriage bureau shut down during the course of my fieldwork. Similarly, Muneera (RB, 32, Lohar) talked about the difficulties they were encountering in finding an equally educated spouse for her *nanad* [HZ], a post-graduate in her early 30s, and said that they would have to seek the help of a professional matchmaker to arrange a marriage for her.

The term *bīcholiā* was used for matchmakers or intermediaries that negotiated RM. Elderly Jat informants (over 65 years) talked about marriages of their fathers’ and grandfathers’ generations being arranged by the family *nāī* [barber] and Brahmin (see also Pradhan 1961). Harpal (70, Jat, M) said that families stopped relying on the *nāī* and Brahmin because they started arranging “*be-mel shādīs*” [unsuitable matches], e.g. the groom had a physical disability or the age gap between spouses was too large. He added that the *nāī* and Brahmin were given grain by Jat farmers for their services and some started demanding cash payments for arranging marriages. For these reasons, families started calling on kin networks to arrange marriages.

Most marriages in Barampur continued to be negotiated through caste and kin networks. According to my village survey data on 606 couples in RMs, 14.5 per cent of marriages were arranged by parents, siblings or spouse of a sibling, 71.1 per cent through extended family members, 10.9 per cent by a caste member and 3.5 per cent by a member of a different caste. For instance, Muneera (RB, 32, Lohar) told me that her marriage was arranged by her sister’s father-in-law (a school teacher) who was known to a Jat school teacher in Barampur, himself well known to Muneera’s in-laws.

Ethnographic studies on rural north India point to the important role that women play in arranging marriages by bringing “suitable” girls (such as their sisters or their brother’s daughters) to the attention of their husband’s kin (Sharma 1980: 144-147; Jeffery et al. 1989: 25). More recent studies note the role of mobile phones in increasing and aiding rural women’s role in negotiating marriage (Tenhunen 2008). In Barampur, mobile phones enabled women to make enquiries from extended family kin about prospective brides and grooms for their children. Men often acted as mediators, bringing in their wives’ sisters as spouses for male kin or fellow caste members. Chamar and Kumhar informants talked about how, with migration for brick-kiln work, marriages were also being arranged (though in small numbers) through other brick-kiln workers who drew on their networks in their source villages to arrange marriages, thus resulting in widening marriage circles.

Informants across castes stressed that in the “past” marriages were arranged based on trust on the *bīcholīā* but this was no longer the case as they were known to lie, exaggerate and withhold information. Women talked about their families being deceived with regard to their husbands’ employment, age, a previous marriage, size of landholdings etc. Shakuntala (37, Jat, F) remarked that the role of the *bīcholīā* ended once a match had been suggested. Families made enquiries through relatives or acquaintances in the prospective spouse’s village. Amarpal (65, Jat, M) told me:

A woman’s father may come to the man’s village, for instance, on the pretext of buying a buffalo and then he will get information about the man and his family from the neighbours. Some go as far as travelling to the prospective groom’s place of work to confirm that he does in fact work as claimed.

(16 August 2013)

Kumhar informants said that it was common to give the *bīcholīā* a set of clothes for negotiating the marriage. The same was the practice among the Chamars, although my informants pointed out that families had started giving a bottle of alcohol or cash in addition to sets of clothing to the *bīcholīā*. Jagdish (38, Chamar, M), like some other informants, told me that *bīcholīās* had started demanding gold rings and mobile phones for arranging marriages. When I asked Harpal (70, Jat, M) if something was given by Jats to the *bīcholīā* for arranging the marriage, he remarked: “We are not Chamars” (22 October 2012) distancing themselves and looking down upon such a

practice. Muslim informants also said that *bīcholīās* were not given anything for negotiating marriages.

2.3. “Choice” in Marital Decisions

Ethnographic studies point out that the selection of spouses for one’s offspring is the sole responsibility of family elders/parents. In her work in north-west India, Sharma noted that parental arranged marriages were based on the rationale that the boy and girl were too immature to make the necessary judgements themselves. The bride was expected to be innocent of what is going on in conformity with the idea that an unmarried girl should have too much sexual modesty to take an interest in her own marriage (1980: 151). Similarly, in their work in Bijnor, Jeffery and Jeffery found that young women were neither consulted nor made suggestions about how their parents should settle them in their marriage as by doing so their families would be dishonoured by their brazenness (1996: 2). Kaur and Dhanda argue that the arrangement of marriage for one’s adult children is a “peculiarly south Asian inter-generational contract” based on a sense of mutual obligation between the generations (2014: 271). Mukhopadhyay sees the lack of choice in decision-making for participants in a marriage as a “hangover from the custom of infant marriage” (2011: 123). Studies on urban middle-class Indians note the greater participation of young people in marital decisions but not complete autonomy with regard to choosing a spouse, with parental approval remaining key (Donner 2002; Twamley 2014).

In Barampur, across castes, women were not consulted during decision-making on choice of spouse. Once parents saw that a daughter had become *jāwān* [mature] her marriage was arranged. Kripa (RB, 75, Jat) believed that women of her and her daughter’s generation had no control over their marriages, but women of the present generation of marriageable ages who were pursuing higher education had some say in their marital decisions. Ambika (early 20s, Jat, F) told me that she had managed to convince her father to delay her marriage for two years so that she could complete her Masters degree. Not all parents took their daughter’s opinion into consideration, however. Abha (RB, 25, Chamar) was married at the age of 13. She told me that her *tāū’s* [FeB] daughter was the same age and was still unmarried. She explained that her mother had passed away and her father could not “keep an eye on a young

unmarried daughter” (19 December 2012). Similarly, Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) said her mother gave her no option but to marry, saying that they had her four younger sisters to marry too.

Women talked about how it was regarded as shameful for them to express their opinion to their parents. Shanti (RB, 24, Kumhar) told me: “When I saw my husband I thought he was *kālā* [literally black, but used for dark skin] and I am light-skinned yet I could not say to my parents that I do not want to marry him” (11 March 2013). Babli (19, Chamar, F) was a second year undergraduate (one of the few women in her caste). She talked to me about how she wanted to marry after two years and wished to marry an educated boy with a *naukrī* [regular/non-manual job]. She added that she could not say this to her parents and was aware that if her parents decided to marry her after a month to a brick-kiln worker, she would have no choice but to agree. Moreover, if she asserted her choice and married a man without parental consent, even if he was a Chamar, her parents would sever ties with her. Similarly, young Jat women shared their ideas on the kind of man they wanted to marry (e.g. with a government job) yet stressed that the decision would be made by their parents. Omvati (65, Jat, F) explained the difference between young women of the present generation and those like herself: “We did not think about such things [desired qualities in a spouse], whatever and wherever our parents decided” (11 March 2013).

Like women, men were not usually consulted with regard to when and where they should be married, though some women informants stressed that men had more say on the matter than women. Satender (55, Chamar, M) talked about telling his father that he did not want to marry until he completed his graduation, yet his father fixed his marriage when the family was approached with a marriage proposal for him. He added that the final decision then and now rests with parents.

Women informants told me that they had not seen their husbands until after the wedding. During my fieldwork, there had been a change in this practice. Some informants told me that they had seen their husbands and their husbands had seen them before the wedding. Three RBs (one Jat, Lohar and Chamar, all married for less than 10 years) said that they talked to their husbands on the (mobile) phone during the period between *sagai* [engagement] and wedding. This, however, was not usual.

More commonly, the young man and woman would be shown a photograph of the future spouse once the marriage had been fixed by family elders.

2.4. Marriage Prestations

2.4.1. Dowry

In Barampur, across castes, older and younger informants alike said that there was no dowry when they got married. In their understanding, what was given to a daughter at her wedding were *sāmān* [goods] and this was a *rivāj* [custom] given *apnī marzī se* [willingly]. This was not *dahej* [dowry] because it was not demanded. A few informants, though, believed that *sāmān* was also *dahej*, yet they insisted that this was not demanded but given *khushī se* [out of happiness, voluntarily]. Apart from the *sāmān*, the wedding expenses that included a *dāwat* [feast] were also met by the bride's family. This put an enormous strain on the poor, who often fell into debt. Some said that their daughters were of marriageable ages yet they would delay their marriages as they could not afford to meet wedding expenses. Even for those who were better off, it was not easy. Kripa (RB, 75, Jat) told me about her granddaughter's wedding in 2013: "My son's annual income from agriculture is ₹100,000. My husband receives a pension. We drew on his savings and borrowed some from a relative and that is how we spend ₹600,000 on the wedding" (19 May 2013).

In responding to questions about dowry escalation (see AIDWA 2003; Jeffery 2014), informants stated that what had changed over time were the *sāmān* given to a daughter. Elderly informants said that when they got married they brought with them items such as a bed, utensils, sets of clothing for the bride and husband's kin, wristwatch, bicycle and umbrella, but the *sāmān* that are given to daughters now constituted furniture, utensils, clothes but also electrical appliances such as a television and refrigerator etc. Informants married for over 20 years (prior to the 1990s) suggested that demand for dowry was a new phenomenon, although dowry demands have a longer history (Aziz 1983; Sambrani and Sambrani 1983; Srinivas 1984).

Khalida (RB, 45, Teli) stated: “People have become greedy. Last week they came to see my *devar*’s [HyB] daughter. They left saying the girl is dark-skinned. The *bīcholīā* [matchmaker] told us that after they learnt that my *devar* has five daughters and is a poor rickshaw puller, they thought he would not be able to give much to his daughter” (12 March 2013). I was told that only a man with a government job could demand a dowry and these demands were communicated through the *bīcholīā*. Ashok (39, Jat, M) explained:

A man with a government job will be given a motorcycle, cash and a gold ring and chain. This the bride’s family will give on their own. An engineer’s or bank job is considered better than a job in the Police. Employment in the Delhi Police is considered better than in the UP Police because it means living in the city. So a boy in the Delhi Police will get a car in dowry and the wedding will take place in the town and a man in the UP police will get less. When a boy in the Delhi Police, for instance, is approached his family will first ask how much the woman’s family is willing to spend and the family willing to spend the most will be chosen. It is like a system of bidding.

(1 December 2012)

What Ashok alludes to is that the amount of dowry is proportional to a man’s position within the occupational hierarchy or his “eligibility”. Also, that a family hoping to secure an “eligible” groom is aware that they will have to provide a large dowry due to competition for the few eligible grooms (see Chapter Three). Sambrani and Sambrani describe this as the “virtual auction of the eligible men to the highest bidders” (1983: 602). Rampal (87, Jat, M), for instance, told me that his son-in-law works as a food inspector in the nearby town and that there were no demands from his family, yet in 2010 they gave him a car that cost ₹800,000. Informants were suggesting that such men deserved or had earned the dowry they were given by virtue of being successful. Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) remarked: “The parents of a man with a *sarkārī naukrī* [government job] think that they should be given a dowry as compensation for spending on their son’s education” (22 October 2012). Aziz argues that the transition from “a voluntary gift” to “a compulsory payment agreed to by mutual bargaining” occurred when “the concept of groomhood underwent a drastic change from the normal eligible bachelor to a fancy product” (1983: 604).

Kavita (41, Jat, F) told me: “A man in the Police receives a vehicle in dowry then another also a government employee starts having the same expectation and then it becomes a common practice” (15 August 2013). Yusuf (77, Lohar, M) similarly explained the practice of giving a motorcycle among Muslims in dowry as an imitation of the practices of “others” – Hindus, he clarified (see also Vatuk 2007). Among Muslims, Vatuk noted that dowry called *jahez* takes the form of household goods, clothing and jewellery rather than cash, but that it was taking on a form approaching that of Hindu groomprice (Vatuk 1993). Informants often mentioned “*achī shādī*” [a good marriage] by which they meant a marriage with a good dowry that reflected the status of both families. When a bride moved to live at her *sasurāl* post-wedding, a *mūh dikhāī* [face showing ceremony] took place that served as an occasion for the display of dowry and hence status. Scholars argue that in a situation of increased desirability for consumer goods, families may see dowry as a way of obtaining them (Palriwala 2009; Srinivasan and Lee 2004).

Some scholars see dowry as integral to hypergamy (Dumont 1970; Srinivas 1984). In Barampur, poor informants, across castes, stressed that they arranged isogamous marriages for their children as they could not fulfil the demands that came with marrying hypergamously, i.e., a man with a *naukrī* [regular/salaried job]. In an isogamous marriage, there were no demands, they gave as per their means. Informants explained that a daughter could not be sent to her *sasurāl* [in-law’s home] *khālī hāth* [empty handed]. It was essential to give *thorā bahut* [a small amount] for the sake of one’s *izzat* [honour]. Muslim informants said that even when marriages were arranged with close-kin, the woman’s parents had to give her *sāmān*.

Informants explained that a daughter was given *sāmān* so that when she set up her own household she would have everything she needed. Some believed that a daughter was not given a share in her parental property so dowry served as her share; as scholars describe it, it was seen as “pre-mortem inheritance” (cf. Goody and Tambiah 1973). Further, they pointed out that even if the groom’s family made no demands at the stage of negotiation it was not possible to give only a daughter in marriage as her in-laws would taunt her: “What did you bring from your parent’s home?” Thus, while informants insisted that they gave willingly, they pointed out

that there was an expectation on the part of the groom's family that had to be met. Parents had to give to ensure the happiness of their daughter in her *sasurāl*. Studies also point to the voluntary character of the gifts disappearing and dowry becoming a coercive practice (Aziz 1983; Palriwala 1989; Srinivas 1984; Srinivasan 2005; Srinivasan and Bedi 2007). In this context, in their work in Bijnor, Jeffery and Jeffery noted that people talked about a married daughter as a potential "hostage" and the "looting" perpetrated by families with sons (1996: 70).

Across castes women shared their experience of being taunted by their in-laws for not bringing enough dowry or bringing less than other in-married women of the household. Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) pointed out to me all the things that her parents gave that included almost all the furniture in her household. She said that her father did not give a refrigerator and an air cooler and her *sās* [mother-in-law] taunted her saying that her parents gave her nothing. A dowry is also considered essential for a woman to secure her position in her *sasurāl*. Ritu (RB, 25, Jat) declared proudly that she had brought a much larger dowry than her two *jethānīs* [HeBW] and was favoured by her *sās*. Palriwala argues that while in the past "gifts cemented and reaffirmed alliances, affinal ties now ensure gifts and wealth. If the demands are not met, the tie is endangered" (1994: 88). "*Denā partā hai*" [you have to give] is what most informants across castes said to explain why the birth of a daughter brought sadness. The gifts given to a daughter did not end at wedding but were given to her through the course of her married life (see 7.3).

Yusuf (77, Lohar, M) explained that dowry is not sanctioned by the Shariah and that it was the duty of the bridegroom to pay *mehr* to the bride. *Mehr* or marriage settlement is meant to provide for a woman in difficult times (Jeffery 1979: 57). The amount is supposed to be negotiated at the time of the *nikāh* [Muslim marriage ceremony] and written in the *nikāh nāmā* [marriage contract]. Women informants pointed out that a marriage should not be consummated without the payment of *mehr* yet it was rarely paid in practice, as is noted by other studies on Muslims in South Asia (Donnan 1988; Jeffery 1979, 2001; Vatuk 1993). Muslim informants said that they had either *māf kīyā* [forgone the *mehr*] or that they would claim it in the event of divorce.

2.4.2. Dowryless Marriages

While dowry was the predominant form of marriage payment in Barampur, Jat and Kumhar informants cited cases of marriages where men had taken women from poor families in marriage without a dowry. Such men were “ineligible” owing to e.g. a physical disability or previous marriage. Yet, as Kripa (RB, 75, Jat) pointed out, parents of daughters agreed to such marriages because these men were wealthy or landed and parents thought that their daughters will have comfortable lives. Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) said that she got her oldest daughter married to a much older widower (also Jat) with three children because they did not have to give a dowry. I heard rumours of this not just being a dowryless marriage but one where the groom had paid a big sum of money to the father of the bride for the marriage. Chamar informants cited instances where fathers who were “alcoholics, gamblers or those in debt” had “*paisay le kar*” [taken money] to get their daughters married to “ineligible” men within the caste. Satender (55, Chamar, M) referred to this as *bechna* [selling] and added: “Everyone in the caste knows about this, *par iss bāt par pardā hai*” [but this is hidden] (25 March 2013). Accepting a payment for a daughter was spoken of as selling because bride-price negates the spirit of *kanyādān* [gift of a virgin] (see 2.1).

Bride-price⁸ existed among the Chamars in the past (cf. Briggs 1920: 36), even though Chamar informants suggested that they could not recall anything other than the giving of *sāman* by the bride’s family to the groom’s ever being an accepted practice among them. Scholars point out the association of dowry with higher status groups and bride-price with lower status groups (CSWI 1974; Uberoi 1994; Unnithan 1992) and the shift to dowry among communities that previously practised bride-price (AIDWA 2003; CSWI 1974; Oldenburg 2002; Palriwala 2009; Sheel 1999). Srinivas (1984) sees this shift as an attempt on the part of lower castes to Sanskritise. Studies show that higher or non-bride-price practising castes speak of bride-price among the lower castes as sale of a daughter/woman (Das 1975: 78; Parry 1979; Unnithan 1992: 67). For the Pandits of rural Kashmir, Madan noted: “The idea of

⁸ Chamar informants used *mol* [price] and *bechna* [to sell] when talking about payments made to the bride’s family by the groom’s and attempted to distance themselves from the practice. Through the course of my fieldwork, I did not hear a term that in local usage connoted bride-price.

selling a child is very repugnant to the Pandits and a man who receives money for his daughter is regarded as one fallen very low". Thus, payments to the parents of the bride among the upper/dominant castes are infrequent and concealed (Madan 2002: 104; Raheja 1988: 266). In Barampur, Chamar informants themselves referred to bride-price as selling and said it was "hidden", as it was among the Jats, an attempt to distance themselves from what was regarded as a demeaning practice – giving a daughter in marriage "without *dān dahej*" [without a dowry negating the spirit of *kanyādān* marriage] (Raheja 1988: 236). What this points to is the idea that price or sale and not gift accompanies all marriage prestations made to the parents of the bride by the groom. Bloch and Parry write:

The problem seems to be that for us money signifies a sphere of "economic" relationships which are inherently impersonal, transitory, amoral and calculating. There is therefore something profoundly awkward about offering it as a gift expressive of relationships which are supposed to be personal, enduring, moral and altruistic.

(1989: 9)

Parents of unmarried men, struggling to find brides, said that they were willing to agree to a marriage without dowry. Yet informants suggested that in Barampur, cases of dowryless marriages were few. In their work in Haryana and Punjab, Larsen and Kaur (2013) found that bride shortages had resulted in reduced demands for dowry, as earlier predicted by some demographers (cf. Bhat and Halli 1999; Das Gupta and Li 1999). Yet, in Barampur there did not appear to be a decline in dowry and dowry marriage remained the norm. Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) explained: "Even an extremely poor Jat will borrow money from a moneylender to arrange a dowry for his daughter but he will not get his daughter married to an unemployed man" (24 February 2013), pointing to the practice of hypergamous marriage and dowry. Jeffery argues that the relation between marriage squeeze (against men) and decline in dowry is more complex than "demographic determinism" can explain. Rather than withering, dowry is more likely to persist in the upper levels, while increasing numbers of poor men must wait for several years to marry or remain unmarried (2014: 179, 182), as has been the case in Barampur (see Chapter Three).

Conclusion

In Barampur, a normatively “correct” marriage was one that conformed to norms of caste endogamy, *gotrā* and village/territorial exogamy. While there has been an expansion in marriage distance, marriages continued to be arranged within or in a neighbouring district and within the state of UP. Among Muslims, there was no *gotrā* and kin marriages forbidden among Hindus were permitted even though they were not the norm. Forms of exchange marriage were acceptable as they conformed to the above mentioned norms yet were not regarded as ideal but as lesser forms of marriage as they negated the valued ideology of *kanyādān* [gift of a virgin].

Some informants mentioned relying on intermediaries such as professional matchmakers, and others talked about new networks that labour migration created for facilitating marriages. Yet, most RMs continued to be negotiated through networks of caste and kin. There had been an increase in age at marriage for both men and women and no longer an age gap between wedding and co-habitation. There had been no change, however, with regard to greater choice for rural young men and women in their marital decisions. These decisions remained entirely in the hands of parents or family elders.

My findings suggest the persistence of dowry, described as *sāman* [goods], across castes and dowry escalation in hypergamous marriage. Cases of dowryless marriage appeared to be few, despite the difficulties confronted by men in finding brides. Given the ideology of *kanyādān* marriage with dowry as customary and honourable, all payments made by the groom to the bride’s family were perceived as sale of a daughter/bride and hence regarded as a lower practice. Some men accepted lower and less prestigious marriages yet some others failed to marry regionally either remaining bachelors or bringing CRBs. In the following chapter, I discuss the reasons why some men fail to marry according to the desired norms, outlined in this chapter and the strategies they adopt in response to the difficulties faced.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXTUALISING CROSS-REGIONAL MARRIAGE

Marriage is not only a religious duty, but also an economic necessity...The bachelor's life is not a happy one.....There is no one to look after his house, no one to bring the midday meal to the fields, no one to pick the cotton or to help in the weeding.

(Malcolm Darling 1928: 58)

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts – the first outlines why men fail to marry within the caste and local region and hence seek wives from other states. The second explains why women become CRBs. As discussed earlier (see Introduction), the growing concern in the north Indian states about the inability of some men to marry has been attributed largely to demographic factors – a shortage of marriageable women. “*Ab shādī hone mein pareshānī hai*” [Now it is difficult to get married], was one of the most often repeated statements in Barampur. I begin by discussing sex ratios for the district as this has been the focus of much of the literature that attempts to contextualise CRM. The sex ratios for Meerut/Baghpat have historically been and remain extremely masculine. Yet while demographic factors are not insignificant, I demonstrate that they alone cannot explain the difficulties faced by men with regard to marriage.

Part One: Barampur, Bride-Receiving Region

3.1. A Shortage of Marriageable Women? Sex Ratios, Son Preference and “Daughter Aversion”

In India, sex ratios are reported as number of females per 1000 males. It is uncommon for sex ratios to be one of parity and a sex ratio of 1000 would not be expected. Typically, different age groups have different profiles. Since more boys are born than girls, sex ratios at birth (SRB) and early ages display a surplus of males: sex ratios of around 960 would not be surprising for these age groups. Tables 3.1 and 3.2, however, show a pattern of highly masculine sex ratios in the district that pre-date the spread of sex-selective technologies.

**Table 3.1: Overall Sex Ratios (Number of Females per 1000 Males)
Meerut/Baghpat (Source: Census of India)**

Year	Meerut district	Baghpat tehsil
1951	837	836
1961	843	849
1971	831	837
1981	838	834
1991	851	838
	Baghpat district	
2001		847
2011		858

**Table 3.2: Age-wise Sex Ratios 15-34 years (Number of Females per
1000 Males) Meerut/Baghpat (Source: Census of India)**

Meerut	Sex ratio
1961	931
1971	860
1981	824
1991	852
Baghpat district	
2001	824

Insights from Barampur shed light on the persisting masculine sex ratios in the district. In the village, the necessity of a son was felt across castes. What existed was not only son preference but also “daughter aversion” reflected, for instance, in the words of Ompal (55, Kumhar, M): “You have to please god/s to ensure that you will get a son but daughters have a habit of arriving even when you do not request them” (13 August 2013). Son preference and “daughter aversion” were much stronger among the Jats than the other castes. Jats attributed growing bachelorhood to “*larkī kī kamī*” [a shortage of women] yet perceived bride shortages had not changed their attitude towards girl children. Jat informants admitted to going in for pre-natal sex selection even though they were aware of the PNDT (Pre-Natal Diagnostic

Techniques Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 that banned pre-natal sex determination in India.⁹ They also cited instances of female neglect and lack of medical attention given to female infants and young girls in the past. Jat informants talked about how infanticide was a common practice in Rajasthan and Bulandshahr (UP) but they could not recall any incidents of infanticide in this part of UP. Ethnographic studies, however, suggest that infanticide was historically prevalent among the Jats of western U.P. (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Pradhan 1961). Saroj (35, Jat, F) an *āshā* [government appointed health worker] told me:

Everyone here is aware that you can have pre-natal sex determination done. For the first child, people do not generally get ultrasounds because they have to pay a huge sum of money. It is done for the second child, if the first child is a girl. Over the last year, in my area [covering 150 Jat and a handful of Muslim households], 12 boys were born and only one girl. Till about a year ago, people got sex selective abortions done through *āshā* workers. I used to take women to private clinics at Shamli [40 kms from Barampur]. The clinics would give us a commission for taking them. It can be done both at Baraut [nearest town] and at Shamli. Earlier they took ₹1500 and now ₹3000-5000. Now I no longer do this as I have understood that it has been banned by the government; that we may have to pay a fine and can even be jailed.

(7 June 2013)

The ban on sex determination is more than a decade old. Saroj did not explain when exactly she stopped and there was no way to confirm if she actually did. Table 3.3 shows caste-wise sex ratio data for the former United Provinces in which Barampur is located, last available for the 1931 Census.

Table 3.3: Caste-wise Sex Ratios ((Number of Females per 1000 Males) all Ages and 0-6 United Provinces (Source: Census of the United Province of Agra and Oudh 1933)

Caste	All Ages	0-6
Kumhar	928	1007
Chamar	957	1011
Teli	910	1013
Lohar	887	975
Jat	776	938

⁹ The Act was amended in 2003 to The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, PCPNDT Act.

Writing in 1920, Briggs wrote that female infanticide was not practised by the Chamars, although female infants were neglected and were more subject to plague and malaria. Yet, drawing on the 1911 census figures he states that the proportion of females to males was high (1920: 45). If we compare the sex ratios for Chamars in 1931 (Table 3.3) with those for the Scheduled castes over a 50-year period (Table 3.4), it is clear that the sex ratios have become increasingly masculine and similar to those of other castes, also noted by studies (Bhat and Francis Xavier 2007; Siddhanta et al. 2009).

Table 3.4: Scheduled Caste Sex Ratios all ages (Number of Females per 1000 Males) Meerut/Baghpat (Source: Census of India)

Year (Meerut)	Sex Ratio
1961	901
1971	863
1981	817
1991	842
Baghpat district	
2001	841
2011	865

Table 3.5: Sex Ratios Hindu and Muslim All ages (Number of Females per 1000 Males) Meerut/Baghpat (Source: Census of India)

Year	Muslim	Hindu
Meerut		
1961	873	836
1971	864	823
1981	877	826
1991	884	838
Baghpat district		
2001	897	829

Unlike Jat informants, Chamar informants claimed: “*check nahī karwāte*” [did not get pre-natal sex determination done] but Teli, Lohar and Kumhar informants said that even in their castes families had started using pre-natal sex selection. The sex ratios for Muslims (Table 3.5) are less masculine than those for Hindus yet are not favourable. As has been well documented in the literature and discussed in the Introduction, in Barampur too, the reasons for persisting son preference included old-age support and carrying forward the family name. A son was necessary to inherit the property as a daughter was regarded as *parāyī* [belonging to her husband’s home]. It was believed that it would be difficult to get a daughter married if she did not have a brother. After the parents passed away, a brother was necessary to sustain the affinal relationship – *len den* [taking and giving]. Poor Chamar, Kumhar and Teli informants stressed the desire for not one but two sons. Shanti (RB, 24, Kumhar) explained: “We are poor people; one son alone cannot sustain a family” (1 April 2013).

Informants across castes explained how the birth of more than one daughter brought with it a feeling of sadness because of dowry and gifts that had to be given through the course of her married life. Saroj (35, Jat, F) explained: “No one desires a daughter because of increasing expenses. You can neither educate them nor get them married. Boys will earn and bring money into the family and then they will get married and their wives will bring a dowry” (7 June 2013) (see also Jeffery et al. 1989: 182-88).

In this region, masculine sex ratios have been a matter of concern since the nineteenth century when the British campaigned against infanticide (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997: 230-31). A look at the census data on marital status for the last 50 years (Table 3.6) for Meerut/Baghpat suggests that not much has changed with regard to the percentage of never-married men in the district with the exception of 1961 (that saw a slight increase). The census data do not indicate inflated percentages of never-married men that would be the logically expected consequence of long-term and worsening sex ratio imbalances. Does this mean that the contemporary panic regarding increasing bachelorhood is exaggerated? If there has not been any significant shift in percentages of never-married men over a 50 year period, then why

is the inability of men to marry spoken of as a situation peculiar to the present context?

**Table 3.6: Percentage of Never-Married Men over 35 years
Meerut/Baghpat (Source: Census of India)**

Year	Never-Married Men (%)
Meerut	
1951	5.3
1961	7.9
1971	5.3
1981	5.4
1991	5.3
Baghpat	
2001	5.7

In this chapter, I will argue that while demographic factors provide the context, it is vital to link marriageability to larger changes in political economy in this part of north India to understand why some men experience difficulties in getting married. The difficulties that men face are differentiated by caste, class and individual characteristics. Marriage is an “economic necessity” (Darling 1925) and a “strategy” for social reproduction (Bourdieu 1976, 1977) and I show that men/families adopt different strategies in response to the difficulties faced, with CRM being one. These strategies are tied to ideas of caste and necessities of livelihood. I thus provide a caste-wise description of the difficulties confronted by some men belonging to the five castes that are the subject of this research.

3.2. Unable to Marry: The Unemployed Jat Man

One of the statements I heard most often from respondents across caste in Barampur was that in every Jat household there was at least one *randwā* [never-married man]. This, though exaggerated, highlights the apprehension regarding the inability of men to marry. When talking about *randwās*, informants distinguished between the “past” and the “present”. Elderly informants (65-90) talked about how in their own and previous generations in every family one or two brothers were married and the

remaining were left unmarried in order to prevent the fragmentation of land, given the system of partible inheritance. This has also been noted by earlier studies on the Jats (Chowdhry 2011; Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Kaur 2008; Pradhan 1961). The last available data on caste-wise marital status (for 1931, United Provinces) show that a high percentage – 18.6 – of Jat men remained never-married (Census of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh 1933). The fact that families did not strive to get all sons married in the past offers some insight on why the then existing bride shortage and its consequences for marriageability were not recognised as concerns as they are in the contemporary context.

Women, however, were not left unmarried. Marriage was in fact compulsory for them. Amarpal (65, Jat, M), a *randwā*, explained bachelorhood in terms of the practice of *bithānā* [literally to cause to sit but refers to a levirate marriage], whereby a widowed woman was remarried with her, generally unmarried *jeth* [HeB] or *devar* [HyB]. Among the Jats of Punjab and Haryana, this leviratic marriage (described as *karewā*) was considered the most effective way to control a widow's right to inheritance and thereby retain property within the family (cf. Chowdhry 1994).

As joint living was the predominant pattern of residence, a bachelor was accommodated into the household of his married brother with his brother's wife cooking his meals. He worked with his brother on the land and his brother's children inherited his land. While families did not take into account individual desires to get married, even if to deny it, there were "arrangements" to fulfil the desires of the unmarried with a form of *de facto* fraternal polyandry whereby the unmarried brother had sexual access to his brother's wife, also noted by Pradhan (1961) in his study of the Jats of Meerut in the 1950s. Some respondents, however, denied that this was ever the case.

Jat informants stressed that while bachelorhood was not uncommon in the past, the situation faced by the present generation of young men was different. Rampal (87, Jat, M), a retired Jat school teacher explained: "*Pehle karwāte nahī the, ab sab karwānā chāte hai shādī, par unkī hotī nahī*" [Earlier men were left unmarried, now they all want to get married but cannot] (29 July 2013). It became clear that over time several new considerations had emerged as significant in marriage negotiation.

Among the Jats, size of landholdings had been the primary consideration in the arrangement of marriage. Informants married prior to 1980 explained that when their marriages were arranged parents of daughters agreed to a marriage based on their assessment of the share of land that a man would inherit from his father. Women married hypergamously, i.e., into families with larger landholdings. While the construction of canals in the mid-nineteenth century and agricultural developments such as the Green Revolution made the Jats in this part of western UP prosperous, land ceiling legislations, population growth and land fragmentation over time made landholdings smaller. My survey of Jat households in Barampur shows that 31% of the households were either landless or had less than one acre of land; the majority, i.e., 66%, had between one and five acres and only 3% had more than five acres of land. During my fieldwork, I was told that anything less than three acres was considered too little to attract an offer of marriage.

As landholdings became smaller, agriculture alone could not sustain families. In more than half (57%) of the Jat households, at least one male member was employed outside of agriculture. Informants said that Jats started moving into non-agricultural or salaried employment in the 1960s. Jats also started investing in their children's education (cf. Jeffrey et al. 2008). According to my survey data on education levels of 150 adult Jat men, 16 were illiterate or had dropped out after class five, 16 had a middle-level education (class 6-8) and 118 had a class 10 or above education. Of them, 33 had an undergraduate degree and 11 a postgraduate one. Sahay (2015) in his study of five villages in Baghpat notes that a significantly greater proportion of Jats was represented in higher education than other castes.

My survey shows that the Jats of Barampur were employed in sugar-mills, as school teachers, engineers, factory workers, in the railways, UP and Delhi police, Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force and the Army. Poorer Jat men tended to work as truck drivers, salespersons in shops, security guards and on UP Roadway buses. Many migrated out for work or were daily commuters to Delhi. As landholdings became smaller and non-agricultural employment increased, leaving men unmarried to prevent land fragmentation possibly ceased to be a meaningful strategy among the Jats.

Being educated and having a *naukrī* [regular/salaried job], preferably *sarkārī naukrī* [government job] came to define what it meant to be *kābil* [able] and *kāmyāb* [successful] and hence marriageable. In the “past”, men in the army were not regarded as eligible as the wife was left behind for long periods but given the preference for government jobs, men in the army were highly eligible in the contemporary context. As the criteria of eligibility changed, hypergamy came to operate in a different way. Alka (25, Jat, F), for instance, got married in 2006. She explained that her natal family owned four times the amount of land owned by her husband’s family. Yet her marriage was hypergamous since her husband had a *naukrī* in the private sector while her father and brother were farmers. Vedpal (63, Jat, M) pointed out that even a man with more than 10 acres of land at times faced difficulties in getting married because he was not considered *kāmyāb*. Unmarried Jat women also talked about how they did not regard farmers as desirable spouses (cf. Jeffery and Jeffery 1996).

This preference could be attributed, in part, to an increasing number of Jat women pursuing higher education. Brijpal (78, Jat, M), a retired college teacher told me that most students at the university at present were women. The opposite was the case when he was an undergraduate in the 1950s. Education for women had emerged as a significant criterion in marriage negotiation. Informants agreed that women (unlike men) did not confront difficulties in finding spouses. Yet some informants shared how the search for a spouse for their daughters stretched over a few years, as eligible men were scarce. Kripa (RB, 75, Jat) was illiterate. She talked about her marriage in the early 1950s to her husband, a school teacher with a class 12 education. She compared herself with her postgraduate granddaughter, who was married at the age of 26 years as they had struggled to find a “suitable” match for her – a man with an equal or higher level of education with a *sarkārī* or private *naukrī*. That Jat women had opportunities for higher education and were getting married at older ages reflects positive changes. The flipside is that *kāmyāb* men were few in number, so securing one for one’s daughter meant competition for grooms and providing a large dowry for the marriage.

For some men, even higher education had not helped them to secure employment. In his work on Meerut, Jeffrey (2010) outlines various factors to explain educated unemployment. These include a reduction in the number of new positions created within government bureaucracies and economic liberalisation that failed to generate private sector employment in UP at least till the early 2000s. Only 10 per cent of UP's population had regular work in 2000 (Jeffrey 2014). While rising unemployment has been a challenge for young people across India (Joshi 2010), elderly informants in Barampur were of the opinion that young men failed to find employment as they were not educated enough to secure the jobs they desired. Rampal (87, Jat, M) explained:

Many young men are unable to pass the entrance tests for recruitment in government services and if they manage because their families pay a bribe,¹⁰ they might still fail the physical test as they spend the entire day sitting at the Jat *chaupāl* [courtyard].

(29 July 2013)

Rampal indicates that even though Jats had built networks with government officials, on which they could draw to get jobs for their children (cf. Jeffrey 2010; Sahay 2015), young men were still incapable of securing employment. Many unemployed Jat men neither did agricultural work (like men of the older generation) nor were they willing to take up casual work (such as in construction) as they did not think it fit for someone of their caste status. In Barampur, across castes, it was the practice for the women's family to approach the prospective groom's family with a marriage proposal (see 2.2). I was told that neither did relatives of such men try to get them married nor were their families approached with proposals for them.

3.2.1. Jat Responses: Bachelorhood or CRM?

As marriage norms limit the circle from within which spouses can be selected, the difficulties in finding wives in Barampur resulted in the relaxation of certain norms of marriage, such as the four *gotrā* rule. Ashok (39, Jat, M) explained:

¹⁰ In July 2013, all the leading Indian newspapers ran articles about the entrance examination paper for recruitment of Railway Protection Force constables being leaked in Western UP.

My father's *gotrā* is Tomar. All Jats in this village belong to the Tomar *gotrā*. I cannot marry in the 84 Tomar villages. My *māmā*'s [MB] *gotrā* is Malik so I cannot also marry in the 84 Malik villages. My *dādī*'s [FM] *gotrā* is Baliyan. If all the Baliyan villages had to be excluded as well, it would have become extremely difficult to get married since now additional criteria such as education and *naukrī* have become important. Now only the father's and mother's *gotrā* have to be avoided for the purpose of marriage.

(1 December 2012)

Further, restrictions on marriage in some neighbouring villages were also relaxed due to the difficulties encountered (see also Larsen and Kaur 2013; Kaur 2014 for Haryana).

Another response to the difficulties faced by men has been CRM. The village headman, a Jat, was of the opinion that CRBs could be found among the “*nīchī jātī*” [lower castes] but not among the Jats. Some other Jat informants, however, acknowledged the presence of CRBs among the Jats, but stated that they were fewer in number as compared to other castes because *mol lānā* [buying a wife] from another state had an adverse effect on the *izzat* [honour] of the family. Jat informants insisted that they preferred to leave sons unmarried. Status concerns made bachelorhood preferable to a CRM, because such marriages crossed caste boundaries.

In the context of inter-caste marriages, Kusum (RB, 47, Chamar) told me about a Jat family with four bachelor sons. “They were telling me to bring them a wife from my natal village [in Muzaffarnagar, a neighbouring district]. They said that they were even willing to take a Chuhra [Dalit/regarded by Chamars as even lower in status than them] woman in marriage” (27 February 2013). Whilst this statement indicates the desperation felt by some unmarried men, inter-caste marriages between Jat men and lower caste women within the local region were not known to be taking place, with the exception of self-arranged marriages/elopements that were resisted and often provoked violence (see 8.1).¹¹ Yet CRMs were tolerated and rationalised in terms of *majbūrī* [compulsion] – “for two cooked meals, to pass on the land and carry forward the family”.

¹¹ Studies report marriages between Jat men and lower caste women within the region during the colonial period (Briggs 1920; Chowdhry 2007; Darling [1928], 1977).

The first CRB among the Jats is believed to have come from Darjeeling (West-Bengal) in the early 1960s. Jaya (CRB, 45, Jat) talked about the conversation she had with her husband when he first went to West Bengal to marry her in 1986. “I asked him, why have you come here to marry, are there no women in your village? Who are they marrying? Your sister must have married someone. After I came here, I understood that men go so far because they have some “defect” (21 March 2013). The commonly held opinion was that it was only “disadvantaged” men or those with a “defect” who brought CRBs, also noted by earlier studies (see Introduction).

Not all disadvantaged Jat men, however, brought CRBs. The compulsion to marry was not experienced in the same way by all men. Thus, some remained bachelors whilst others brought CRBs. In Barampur, Jats considered it acceptable for a man to bring a CRB in two situations. Both of which indicate that it was necessary for one man of each generation in a family to marry. *First*, when it was evident that none of the men in a family would get married, one brother could then bring a CRB. Praveen (35, Jat, M) falls in this category. He was a landless truck driver with a class seven education. He had two younger brothers (30 and 32) also unmarried and drivers on private buses. Both had reputations of being alcoholics. Praveen brought Varsha (28) from West Bengal in 1992 when he was 25. His mother felt that it was sufficient that one son was married. She consented to a CRM on the understanding that a RM was not possible for her son. She added that before he went to West Bengal to marry, he secured the consent of her *jeth* [HeB], the senior-most male of the *kunbā* [extended family]. Praveen’s brothers lived with him and contributed their earnings to his household.

Second, a CRM was regarded as acceptable when a man was the only son and failed to get married within the local region. Vinod, for instance, brought Pushpa (late 30s) from Bihar in the early 1990s. Pushpa said that Vinod was much older than her. He had less than two acres of land. Additionally, he suffered from a physical disability and had previously been married to a CRB who “ran away” before he married Pushpa. She talked about how it was necessary for Vinod to have a family of his own or else his sister’s son would inherit his share of the land.

There were a few cases of men who did not fall in either of the above two categories. They were aware that a marriage in UP was not possible for them. Amar (52, Jat, M) was a drug addict. He owned less than an acre of land. His mother was the third “wife” of a Jat man from Barampur and though a UP woman, she was of unknown caste status. Amar was her son from a previous marriage. He brought Jaya from West Bengal in 1986 without the consent of his family, prioritising his desire to get married over necessity and familial decisions. His mother said that she was extremely unhappy when her son returned with a Bengali wife as she was concerned that this would affect the marriage prospects of her younger educated employed son. Such men had taken the initiative to arrange a marriage for themselves, in contrast to the practice in RMs that are parentally arranged (see Chapter Two).

3.3. At the Bottom of the Eligibility Hierarchy: The Chamar Brick-Kiln Worker

Unlike the Jats, the difficulties that Chamar men faced in getting married were explained not in terms of unemployment but as linked to seasonal labour migration to the brick-kilns. Informants said that parents who themselves worked in the brick-kilns did not want to give their daughters in marriage to other brick-kiln workers because they did not want their daughters to have hard lives. Chamars were traditionally leather-workers and agricultural labourers for Jat farmers. Migration to the brick-kilns started from 1960s and most Chamars had abandoned leather-work by the early 1980s. In the kilns, they worked as *patherās* – peparing the soil and moulding it into raw bricks before they were shifted for firing in the kiln.

Satender (55, Chamar, M) talked about difficulties in getting married as a problem faced by men of his son’s generation but not his own. I pointed out to him that it was largely men of his generation who had brought CRBs. To this he replied: “*Hā, problem kāfī din se hai*” [Yes, there has been a problem for a long time] (25 February 2013). Jagmati (RB, early 60s, Chamar) told me that even when she got married in the mid-1960s, parents were unwilling to give daughters to brick-kiln workers. At the time, those who worked in the brick-kilns were a minority. Satender believed that more men of marriageable ages of the present generation and in future would fail to

marry, as labour migration to the brick-kilns had increased over the years, with about 90 per cent of Chamar households in Barampur employed in the brick-kilns.

According to my village survey, 60 per cent of the Chamar households migrated to the brick-kilns (in other parts of the district, Punjab and Haryana) for work for six to eight months in a year. During the remaining four to six months, most (men and women alike) were casual labourers for Jat farmers. The concentration of Chamars in brick-kiln work resulted from several factors that include the decline in traditional leather-work (cf. Varma and Kumar 2006) and lack of available employment throughout the year. Western UP lies in the Green Revolution belt and mechanisation meant that agricultural labour days declined, making the need for alternate employment essential for the landless poor. Unlike other artisan communities like weavers and potters, Chamars had limited opportunities for employment because of their caste status (Varma and Kumar 2006). A significant factor that explains the concentration of Chamars in brick-kiln work is that household income is more than that from other kinds of employment, since women's and other family members' (including children) contributions make it more than a single wage.

Dalits remain far behind upper castes and OBCs as far as access to education is concerned (Corbridge et al. 2013). According to the 2001 Census data for SC men (18 years and above) for Baghpat (rural): 36.1% are illiterate, 13.4% have primary-level, 20.5% middle-level, 12.2% secondary-level, 7.5% higher secondary-level education and 3.5% are graduates or have higher levels of education (C – Series: Social and Cultural Tables 2001). The lack of or lower levels of education limited the possibilities for alternative employment for many Chamar men in Barampur. My survey data on education levels of 130 Chamar adult men in Barampur show that 71 were either illiterate or had dropped out after class five. Twenty-nine had studied to class 10 or above and only three had an undergraduate degree. Moreover, migration to the brick-kilns made it difficult for their children to acquire/continue their education: whilst some continued their schooling at the migration destination, many dropped out.

Lack or lower levels of education also make it difficult to benefit from reservation in government jobs available to the Chamars due to their Scheduled Caste status. Only a

small section among the dalits have access to and benefit from reservation in public sector jobs (Corbridge et al. 2013). In their study in Bijnor district of western UP, Jeffrey et al. (2008) note that Chamar men had failed to use formal education to gain secure employment. Young Chamar men attributed their failure to a lack of social networks and money needed to bribe recruitment officials or brokers for government jobs. Studies also show that even highly qualified dalits encounter discrimination in the formal, urban labour market (Thorat and Newman 2007) and are less likely than non-Dalits to find jobs in the private sector (Deshpande and Newman 2007).

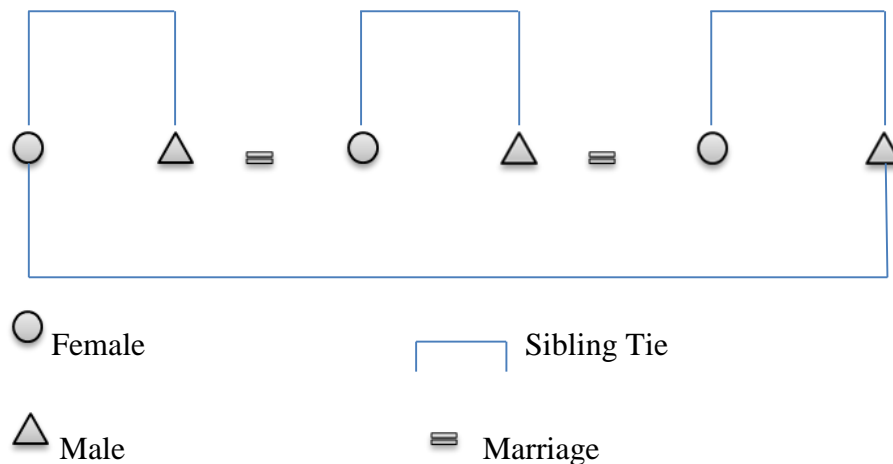
As marriage results in the transfer of a woman's labour to her husband's family, I argue that brick-kiln work makes marriage an "economic necessity" for men since brick making requires family labour, with the core unit usually comprising a husband and wife. On the other hand, it affects men's ability to get married by making them less eligible for marriage in relation to other men of the caste. In the hierarchy of eligibility, a *sarkārī naukār* [government servant] was at the top. According to informants, fewer than five per cent of Chamar men in Barampur were in government employment – in the army, police, railways or municipality. This was followed by men with a private *naukrī* [job]: factory-workers, caterers and sales-work in shops were placed in this category, followed by barbers, tailors, masons, and transporters. Brick-kiln workers were at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Marriages were arranged with families of more or less equal status. Yet marriages were hypergamous in the sense that brick-kiln workers attempted to marry daughters into families that did not do this work, but marriages were not arranged with families of much higher status. Satender (55, Chamar, M), for instance explained that a brick-kiln worker could not marry his daughter to a government employee. Such a man would successfully marry the kind of spouse he desired, with beauty and education being considerations, and would demand a vehicle in dowry. With the exception of brick-kiln workers, men could get married *nirol* [an ideal marriage]. I was told that education for women was a desired attribute in marriage only for the eligible men and not for brick-kiln workers who married illiterate women.

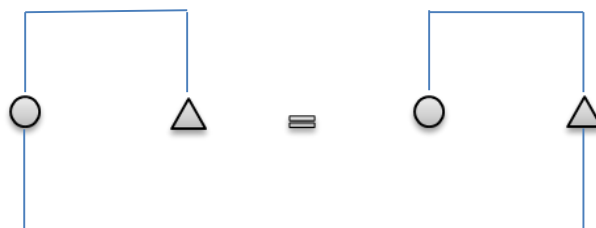
3.3.1. Chamar Responses: Lower Forms of Marriage?

Failing to marry *nirol* [ideal/regular marriage], brick-kiln workers had to resort to other kinds of marriage arrangements. Some Chamar men got married after lying to the woman's family about their employment. It was common for a family working in the brick-kiln to send their son to work elsewhere (as a tailor, in a barber's shop, or factory) and as soon as the marriage took place, he returned to brick-kiln work. There were rumours of men who had taken money from the groom's family (instead of dowry) to get their daughters married to brick-kiln workers (see 2.4.2). Respondents said that a woman, unlike a man, did not face any difficulties in getting married, unless she had a "defect" (e.g. she been previously married and had a child from that marriage). In such cases, she had no choice but to marry a brick-kiln worker who would otherwise find it difficult to find a local wife.

There was also a system of *tigaddā* or *antā-santā* marriage, that is, an exchange marriage that took place between three families/villages (diagram below).



Direct exchange (A gives a bride to B and B reciprocates by giving a bride to A) was not regarded as acceptable but did occur in exceptional cases (diagram below).



Chamar informants were of the opinion that *tigaddā* had been in existence for more than a hundred years. Writing in 1920, Briggs noted exchange marriage (“*wattā sattā*”, “*gurāwat*”, “*adlā badlā*”) among poor Chamars practised to save marriage expenses (1920: 38). During my fieldwork, informants explained exchange marriage as a response to the difficulties confronted in getting married *nirol*. Sham (early 30s, Chamar, M) was of the opinion that the number of *nirol* and *tigaddā* marriages were almost equal in number. A brick-kiln worker, for instance, might give his daughter in marriage to another brick-kiln worker since he wanted a wife for his son who was also a brick-kiln worker and was facing trouble in getting married. Ajay (24, Chamar, M) an unmarried brick-kiln worker with a class ten education, told me:

There has not been a single proposal for me so far and I think that it is because I work in the brick-kiln. Until I find alternative employment, it will be difficult for me to get married. I do not want to have a *tigaddā* marriage even though I have three sisters because you can get any spouse; my sister might get a husband who is a drug addict. My elder sister has a class eight education and if she is married in *tigaddā*, she might get a husband who is illiterate. You do not get the kind of spouse you desire.

(12 August 2013)

Men without sisters could not have a *tigaddā* marriage. Some with sisters, like Ajay, preferred not to have a *tigaddā* marriage. An exchange marriage like a marriage involving a payment to the bride’s parents was considered an inferior form of marriage, for reasons discussed in Chapter Two. In the former the in-married woman would belong to the same caste. It was, thus, considered preferable to a CRM. Nevertheless, compared to the other caste groups in Barampur, I found the largest number of CRBs among the Chamars (and hence a lower proportion of bachelors than the Jats). According to the 2001 Census, 3.25 per cent of Scheduled Caste (Chamar and Valmiki) men over the age of 35 years remained never-married in (rural) Baghpat compared with 6.7 per cent of men of other (non-SC) castes (C-Series Socio-Cultural Tables Census of India 2001). In eastern UP too, dalits form a large proportion of the men bringing brides from West Bengal and its neighbouring states (Kaur 2012). Like the Jats, Chamar informants rationalised CRM in terms of *majbūrī* [compulsion].

According to Chamar informants, the first CRB arrived in the early 1970s and brides have been coming in ever since, with the most recent bride arriving just a few days before I started fieldwork in September 2012. Informants, however, believed that CRMs would decrease in future and hence a larger number of men would fail to marry as parents of (potential) CRBs were unwilling to give daughters in marriage in UP. Satender (55, Chamar, M) explained: “They [the parents] have understood that their daughters will be troubled here. Their husbands make false promises. They do not take them back to visit for several years” (25 February 2013). Jagmati (RB, early 60s, Chamar) talked about approaching three CRBs to act as a go-between to arrange a marriage for her son. She was willing to pay the “expenses” – “*ab koi nahī karwātā*” [now no one agrees], she remarked (31 July 2013). With the exception of three men, the remaining 19 who had CRMs were all brick-kiln workers. For majority of the men who brought CRBs, factors such as a previous marriage, older age, physical disability, illiteracy, a “flawed” reputation (due to gambling, drinking alcohol, consuming drugs) in addition to brick-kiln work had placed them at the bottom of the hierarchy of eligibility and accounted for their inability to get married within the local region.

Six of nineteen men in CRM were above the age of 35 years when they went to bring a bride. Ratanpal (early 70s, Chamar, M), for instance, brought a CRB when he was over 50 years of age. “*Do rotī ke liye*” [for two cooked meals], he told me. Until then, he lived with his parents and worked in the brick-kiln with one of his married brothers. After their parents died, his relationship with his brothers was strained and they were unwilling to accommodate him in their households. The CRB he brought “ran away” a few months later and Ratanpal was living alone during my fieldwork, ill and reliant on his neighbours for food. His case points to the necessity of marriage not just because solo-living is unworkable for a brick-kiln worker but also because marriage ensures the provision of care and that “female tasks” (such as cooking) do not have to be done by men. The brothers of two men in CRM had also married CRBs whilst the brothers of four others remained never-married. Informants also told me that brick-kiln workers sometimes married the daughters of CRBs (see 8.4.2).

3.4. Unable to Marry *Nirol*: The Kumhar (Casual) Labourer

In comparison to the Jats and Chamars, among the Kumhars, concerns regarding the inability of men to marry were less articulated. That Kumhar men did confront difficulties in finding wives is supported by the fact that among their small number (inhabiting around 60-70 households in Barampur), eleven Kumhar men had brought CRBs. Ramesh (50, Kumhar, M) explained that Kumhars were traditionally potters or traders of sugar and *gūr* [*jaggery* or unrefined sugar]. In Barampur only “two-three” young men had government employment, with the majority being *mazdūrs* [casual labourers]. Several Kumhar men from Barampur migrated to work in the brick-kilns for six to eight months in a year performing different tasks from Chamar brick-kiln workers shifting sun-dried bricks to the kiln.

Marriage not only results in the transfer of a woman’s labour to her husband’s family but can also enable the out-migration of male members if women take over farming, household chores, and the care of children (Fan and Li 2002). Unlike among the Chamars, only Kumhar men, not women and children, worked in brick-kilns. For the remaining part of the year, they worked as potters or masons in the village or as salespersons in shops in the nearby town. Others, who did not migrate, worked as vegetable sellers or had small shops in the village. Some young Kumhar men migrated to Delhi to work as transporters or as factory employees. Ompal (55, Kumhar, M) explained that migration for brick-kiln work started with men of his father’s generation as men could no longer support families by working only as potters. He added:

I started going to the brick-kiln when I was 16 years old. I work as a potter for three months of the year and at times as a rickshaw puller or vegetable/fruit seller. Earlier I worked as a potter for 120 Jat families but that is now no longer the case. Before they needed *matkās* [mud pots] to fetch water from the well but now everyone has a submersible pump and refrigerator in their house. For that reason, I have to do other work for a large part of the year. Most young men of the caste do not know how to do this [potter] work because of education or they lack interest.

(13 August 2013)

The commonly held opinion was that young Kumhar men were more educated than men of their father’s generation. Yet many had failed to use education to secure

salaried employment. My survey data on educational levels of 35 adult Kumhar men show that seven were illiterate or had dropped out after class five, 17 had a class eight education and 11 had a class 10 or above education, with three (all in their 20s) being graduates. Informants explained how additional criteria had emerged over time in marriage negotiation. Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar) explained that when she got married in the early 1960s, the only consideration was that the prospective groom came from an *izzatwālā parīvār* [honourable family]. Munesh (RB, 38, Kumhar) said that when she got married in the early 1990s, the prospective groom's education was not considered significant. Parents looked for a man who could work and feed his family. She added that she was educating her daughter and when she gets her daughter married she would look for an educated boy (with at least a class 12 education) preferably with a private job. He should not have any "*burī ādat*" [bad habits] such as drinking alcohol, she added.

3.4.1. Kumhar Responses: *Badlā* or CRM?

As most Kumhar men worked as casual labourers, informants considered they could not marry *nirol* and most were married in *badlā* [exchange], what the Chamars termed *tigaddā*. As among the Chamars, among the Kumhars a *badlā* usually took place between three families but could also be arranged between four or five families. Unlike the Chamars, *badlā* did not necessarily involve exchange of women in the same generation, for instance, one informant explained that her brother was married in *badlā* for her eldest daughter. Like the Chamars, an *āmnā sāmnā badlā* [direct exchange] was regarded as *burrā* [bad] but Ramesh (50, Kumhar, M) explained that families resorted to a direct exchange in *pareshānī* [difficulty], when a marriage could not be arranged anywhere else. *Badlā* was regarded as *nīchā* [lower] yet parents gave daughters in *badlā* so that sons could get married. *Badlā* marriages took place between families of equal status so there were no dowry demands in such marriages. Ompal (55, Kumhar, M) pointed to the lack of trust in *badlā* marriages.

If I give my daughter in *badlā* to family [B], that gives their daughter to a third family [C], from where I should get a daughter-in-law for my son but a few years later since he is not yet of marriageable age, what happens in many cases is that in future, family [C] might refuse to give their daughter in marriage to my son.

(13 August 2013)

He added that because it was common for families to do this, he was planning to get his son (20) married in *badlā* for his daughter (15). He said that the wedding would take place on the same day but he would send his daughter to live at her husband's home three to five years later. He explained that, by doing so, he would also be able to save on wedding expenses. The earlier practice was to get daughters married at younger ages (at times as young as 12) and they were sent to their husband's home when they became older at *gaunā/chālā* [co-habitation]. This was explained in terms of the need to guard the sexuality of young girls. As discussed in Chapter Two, there is now no longer a gap between wedding and co-habitation. Yet, what Ompal suggests is due to the lack of trust, some families had gone back to the earlier practice (of marriage at a young age and cohabitation few years later).

Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar) believed that *badlā* marriages date back to the late 1960s. She said that as families were not approached with marriage proposals for their sons, they started marrying in *badlā* – a response to the difficulties confronted. Others like Virender (52, Kumhar, M) suggested that *badlā* had a much longer history and was the predominant form of marriage in the “past”, with there being a decline in the practice among the present generation of men. He argued that about “50 per cent” men (like him) remained *randwās* because they did not have sisters to have a *badlā* marriage. Some of these men brought CRBs, whilst others preferred to remain never-married.

Not having a sister for a *badlā* marriage was the reason offered by six of the eleven men in CRM. For some, like Ramesh (50, Kumhar, M), having a much older sister and “deterioration in the family's economic situation” made a *badlā* marriage impossible (11 May 2013). All of these men were casual labourers, so a marriage was not possible for them without *badlā*. The first CRB among the Kumhars is believed to have come to Barampur from Cachar district of Assam in the late 1970s.

Six of the eleven men were above the age of 35 years and one over 40 years when they went to other states to get married. After trying and failing to find a local wife, “*jānā parā*” [I was forced to go], Ompal (55, Kumhar, M) told me (13 August 2013). The brothers of three of the men in CRM had also brought CRBs.

3.5. Lohar and Teli: Only a Second Marriage is Difficult

Lohars were numerically the largest of the five Muslim castes in Barampur. Traditionally they were ironsmiths and some did carpentry and were called Barhi Lohars. In the past, several Lohar families had been involved in the production of agricultural implements, but they abandoned that work and moved to live and work in the nearby town. The better-off families within the caste owned tractors and worked for Jat farmers and some were involved in manufacturing machinery, such as flour-milling machines. Poorer Lohars owned small shops of their own in the village or worked as shop employees and as transporters. Several men did welding work in the village or were daily commuters to nearby towns, and some migrated to other cities for this work. Some Lohar men also migrated out to work as factory employees. Most Teli families were poor and men were engaged in casual work. Several Teli men worked in brick-kilns as *nikāśīwāle* – they removed fired bricks from the kiln and stacked them. Others worked as rickshaw pullers, masons, tailors or some sold jaggery.

Yusuf (77, Lohar, M) explained that when he got married in the mid-1950s, *khāndān* [extended family] was the only consideration in marriage. When his daughter got married in the early 1980s, the prospective groom’s employment had emerged as significant in addition to *khāndān*. In the contemporary context, he said that education had become crucial, with at least a class ten education being essential for a man. Muneera (RB, 32, Lohar) got married in 2003. She talked about how her father was searching for a groom with higher education and salaried employment for her as her father himself had a private sector job and Muneera was a graduate. Zubeida (27, Lohar, F), however, was of the opinion that education was irrelevant as she was illiterate. She added that the only consideration for her family was that her husband should be capable of working and feeding his family or in Sakeena’s (RB, 43, Teli)

words he should be “*hāthon pairon kā mazbūr*” [should have strength in his arms and legs] (4 April 2013).

Teli informants pointed out that few Teli men had attained higher education and a *naukrī*. Other studies on western UP also show that Muslims have been unable to invest in formal education and obtain white-collar salaried employment (Jeffrey et al. 2008). In his study of five villages in Baghpat, Sahay (2015) noted that the educational attainment of Muslims was mainly primary level. My survey data on educational levels of 60 adult men (Lohar and Teli) show that half (30) were either illiterate or had dropped out after completing class five, 11 had a class eight education and 19 had a class 10 or above education.

Some studies in other parts of north India suggest that Muslim men were also bringing CRBs owing to compulsions similar to those faced by Hindu men – landlessness or marginal landholding and informal sector employment (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Singh 2009). In Barampur, however, CRBs among Muslims were exceptional. Muslim men with low levels of education and engaged in casual work (e.g. in the brick-kilns) were not facing such difficulty in finding wives as Hindu men (e.g. Kumhar and Chamar also employed in brick-kiln work) were. “*Shādī toh ho jāī hai*” [they get married], several informants told me. There were only two CRBs – one each among the Lohars and Telis. A second CRB was believed to have come among the Lohars in the early 1960s but had died a few years before my fieldwork. Both Muslim men in CRM had been married previously. Of them, one was 60 when he went to Bihar to bring a wife. Informants suggested that additional factors such as children from the previous marriage and “spoiled” reputation made a second marriage difficult for these men. As among the Hindu castes, CRMs were considered *nīchā* [lower] because of the woman’s unknown caste status. Informants also suggested that for Muslim men getting married in the first instance did not present difficulties but trying to enter a secondary union was more complex.

In section 3.1, I indicated that although sex ratios for Muslims are comparatively better than Hindus, they are not favourable so the question that arises is how are Muslim men who may be “disadvantaged” in ways similar to some Hindu men (who fail to marry) successful in making a RM within a context of adverse sex ratios?

Yusuf (77, Lohar, M) explained: “Jats cannot find wives because of *gotrā*. We do not have *gotrā*” (12 August 2013). What Yusuf points to is that Muslims have a larger marriage circle to choose from. Whilst some informants told me that they were not married to relatives due to preference or that a “suitable match” (e.g. in age) could not be found within the circle of relatives, some others believed that cousin marriage had increased over the years. Khalida (RB, 45, Teli) held that close-kin marriages were arranged “*jab hotī nahī*” [when a marriage cannot be arranged elsewhere]. Yusuf (77, Lohar, M) told me about his *tāu*’s [FeB] son. “His reputation is well known; no one was willing to give their daughter in marriage to his son, so he got his son married to his wife’s brother’s daughter” (12 August 2013). Muslim marriage practices, such as cousin marriage permitted for Muslims but forbidden for Hindus could be one explanation for why getting married may be less of a problem for Muslim men as compared to Hindu men but other factors that could explain this need further exploration.

Part Two: Bride-Sending Regions

I will now move on to discuss where CRBs come from and what factors drive their migration. In Barampur, the CRBs I interviewed had originated in thirteen districts of five states: Nasik in Maharashtra, Malda, Jalpaiguri, West Mednipur and South Dinajpur districts of West Bengal, Madhepura and Madhubani districts of Bihar, Hazaribagh, Giridih, Godda, Sahibganj and Pakur districts of Jharkhand and Cachar district of Assam (see map 3.1). The sex ratios in bride-sending states/districts are closer to “normal” (around 960) (Table 3.7). Some of the bride-sending districts have significant tribal populations. Agnihotri (2001) argues that while the absence of discrimination against the girl child may be one factor that contributes to less masculine sex ratios among tribals, “the possibility of excess male foetal wastage and, infant mortality driven by poverty and underdeveloped health infrastructure cannot be ruled out” (2001: 64). My informants did not attribute women’s migration over long-distances for marriage to a surplus of women in the source states. Rather, widespread poverty is central in their accounts of becoming CRB.

Map 3.1: Bride-Sending Districts

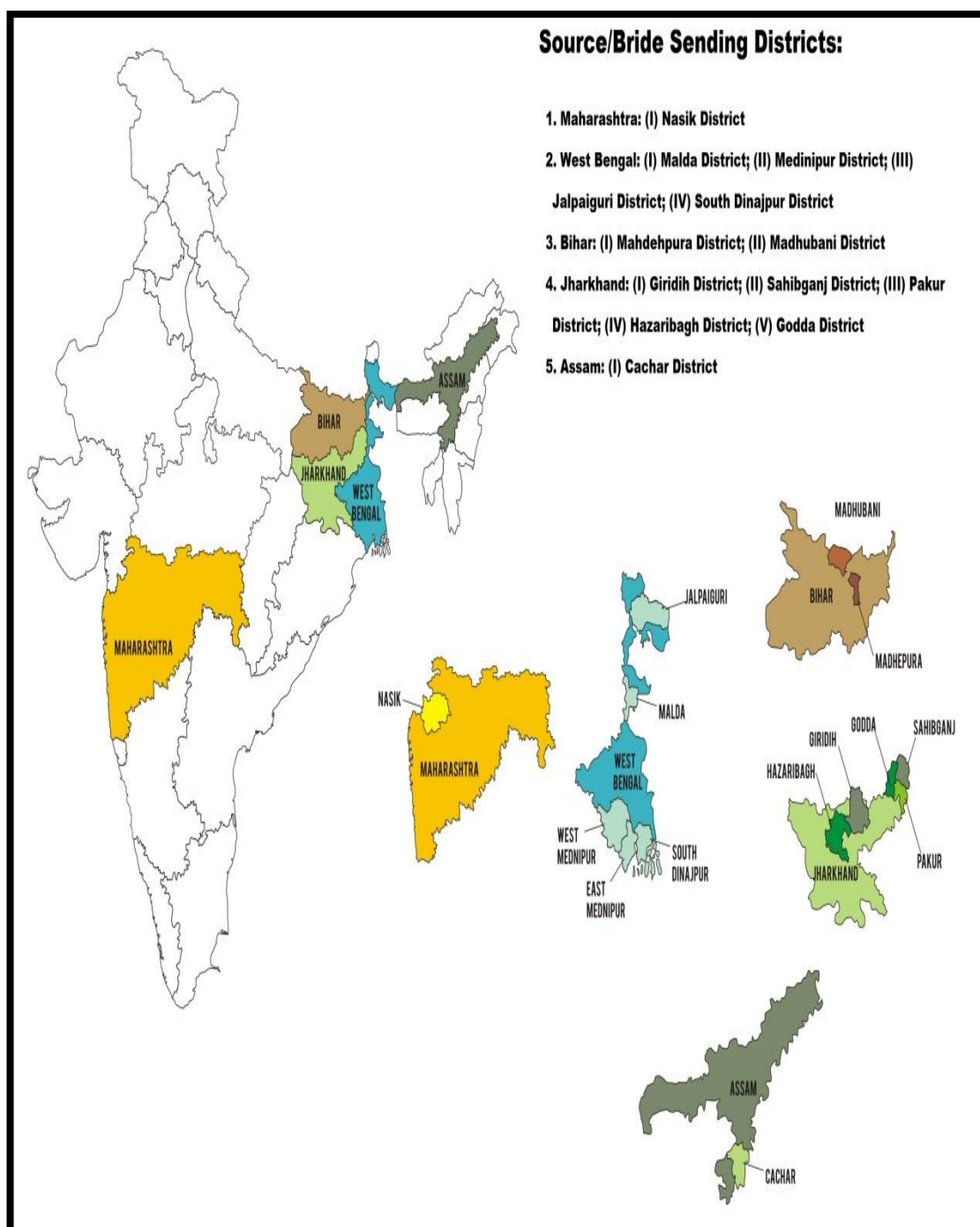


Table 3.7: Sex Ratios of Bride-Sending States/Districts all Ages
(Source: Census of India)

State/District	2001	2011
Assam	935	958
Cachar	945	959
West Bengal	934	950
Malda	948	944
South Dinajpur	951	956
West Mednipur	961	966
Jalpaiguri	942	953
Jharkhand	941	948
Hazaribagh	987	947
Giridih	982	944
Godda	926	938
Sahibganj	942	952
Pakur	957	989
Bihar	919	918
Madhepura	915	911
Madhubani	942	926
Maharashtra	922	929
Nasik	927	934

In the following pages, as I outline the factors that influence CRBs' marriage migration decisions, I show that, given the contexts from where women move to become CRBs, there are instances of the exercise of some agency within constraint. Here I draw on a notion of agency that attends to the "conditions of choice" – the social relations of inequality within which choices are made (Kabeer 1999; Madhok et al. 2013, see Introduction). I place the factors that explain why women become CRBs into five categories.

3.6. Economic Constraints

In Barampur (bride-receiving area), dowry was a primary reason that accounted for “daughter disfavour” and sheds light on the masculine sex ratios and consequent bride shortages. At bride-sending areas, the inability of families to meet dowry demands due to poverty was the most common explanation offered by CRBs for marriage in Barampur, as previously noted by other studies (see Introduction). A CRM meant not only a dowryless marriage but also the wedding expenses were met by the groom (see 4.2). Four of the nineteen CRBs interviewed said that their families were approached with marriage proposals within their native states, but they settled for a CRM because of unrealisable dowry demands. All the CRBs interviewed came from poor families engaged as labourers in casual/informal work in coal-mines or quarries, tea plantation work, or as rickshaw pullers, brick-kiln workers or in agriculture. Some brides came from families with several daughters yet they were the only ones of the sisters married in UP.

In their study of CRM in Haryana and Rajasthan, Kukreja and Kumar found that “birth order” plays a significant role in determining whether a daughter will be married locally or have a CRM. They argue that families appear to exhaust themselves of their assets to meet the wedding expenses of the older daughters. Consequently, those lower down the birth order are disadvantaged as their families do not have the means to marry them locally (2013: 19). My data on the marital status of the siblings of CRBs does not reflect such a pattern with respect to birth order. There are other factors (as I discuss below) that shed light on the marriage of some daughters in UP and others in their native states with a dowry.

Writing about Bengali families with several daughters, Kaur explains CRM of some daughters in terms of a “consumption smoothing strategy” – marrying one daughter with a dowry in West Bengal and sending the others out as CRBs (2010: 18). Renuka (CRB, 33, Chamar) was the only one of my informants who suggested that she was married in Barampur to ease the pressure of providing a dowry for several daughters. She told me that her father did not want to marry her to her husband because her husband was 40 when he went to Jharkhand to marry, but Renuka was only 16. She added that her father was convinced by her *tāu* [FeB]: “He told my father, where will

you get the money from? There are four daughters, give one away there” (3 December 2012).

Nine CRBs said that the decision regarding marriage in UP was made by their parents alone. Six others said that they were asked and they “agreed”. They were told that they were going to Delhi and did not know where Delhi was – only that it was far away. They spoke with an understanding that marriage was compulsory for them; they could not be left unwed and extreme poverty meant their fathers could not provide a dowry or pay wedding expenses. Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) told me: “I thought if there is no choice but to marry, then what difference does it make whether it is near or far?” (21 November 2012).

3.7. Spatial hypergamy

Some scholars argue that decisions regarding long-distance marriage migration are influenced by a desire for upward mobility achieved by marriage migration from less desirable to more prosperous regions (see Introduction). When talking about the source states of CRBs, informants in Barampur often remarked: “*garīb ilākā hai*” [it is a poor region]. Satender (55, Chamar, M) commented: “They call us *dillī ke rājā*” [the kings of Delhi] (25 February 2013). Similarly, Ramesh (50, Kumhar, M) said: “In Bengal, they know of Delhi and they think that Delhi *me barīyā hisāb kitāb hai* [the situation is good there]; their daughter will stay happy” (11 May 2013).

Yet only three CRBs said that the belief that daughters will have a more comfortable life in UP was the motivation for parents to give daughters in marriage in Barampur. Some were convinced by the go-between that life in Barampur would be free of hardships. Renuka (CRB, 33, Chamar), for instance, said that the go-between was her “sister” [MZD] and she convinced her parents to let her go as “both sisters would live comfortably together” (30 October 2012). Even though CRBs often ended up in marriages with men who were poor and disadvantaged (see Part One) and CRBs did not secure the comfortable life they had imagined, some did find themselves in a situation with less extreme poverty as Kalawati’s (CRB, 40, Kumhar) case demonstrates. She told me about her natal village:

Wāhā zyadā garībī hai [there is a lot of poverty there] so they think that the people here are extremely wealthy. Now that I am here, I feel that it is not what I had imagined. I had to do *mazdūrī* [casual labour] there to feed myself and I have to do the same here...but I must say that at least here I am not starving.

(11 March 2013)

3.8. Family Circumstances

For some CRBs, their own decisions were influenced by the attractions of distance from difficult situations back home. Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) explained that apart from poverty, she was married in Barampur as her father, an alcoholic, had absolved himself of the obligation to marry his daughters.

My *chāchī* [FyBW] would tell us sisters to run away from home and get married; that my mother would not be able to get us married...My father was an alcoholic. There was no one to earn. My brothers also did not work. Now my natal family has only less than an acre of land. My father sold the rest when we were children. He even sold my grandmother's jewellery and spent it all on his drinking. Whenever anyone visited us at home, they would ask my mother how she would get four daughters married. My mother would say that if nothing else, she will get us married in *pardesh* [foreign land] but that she would not keep us unmarried. She would say this and cry...now I am married in *pardesh* and so is my older sister.

(21 November 2012)

Deepa (early 30s, Kumhar, F) talked about her father refusing three proposals from UP men, yet she ended up in a marriage in Barampur because her father, the only earning member of the family, had an accident. At the time, they were approached with the offer of a dowryless marriage, so her father agreed. Her elder sister was married in her native state prior to their father's accident. Four brides said that their fathers had already passed away when their husbands came to marry them. Radha (CRB, early 40s, Chamar), for instance, told me that her widowed mother agreed to a marriage with her husband, a much older man, only because of *majbūrī* [compulsion]. About her marriage in Barampur she said: "It was how God decided" (12 October 2012). The older sisters of these brides were married in their native states with a dowry when their fathers were still alive. Two CRBs said that their younger sisters would be married in their native states, because their younger brothers had now started earning.

Two brides from West Bengal, married in the late 1970s and early 1980s, talked about the economic situation of their families deteriorating following floods in their natal villages that made a local marriage difficult for them. At that point in time they were approached by a go-between with the offer of a marriage in Barampur. Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) was orphaned as a child. She lived with her maternal grandmother. She told me:

When I saw him [husband], he was so old...my grandmother was worried that he would die and I would be left a widow but then I thought, I have no other family – mother, brother or sister. Where will I go after my grandmother dies? I told her to let me go to Delhi.

(15 December 2012)

Likewise, Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) lived with her older married brothers. She told me:

I was the youngest of my siblings. My sisters got married then my mother passed away. I thought for how long will my brothers and their wives keep me? I worked at the house of the manager of the tea plantation. I used to cook and look after his children. At home, my brother's wives made me work the entire day. It made me very angry. Then Hemlata [also a CRB from Assam] sent a letter to my brother asking him to send me. She said that I will never go hungry...will not have to work and will live comfortably. I told my brother I will go where Hemlata is.

(2 February 2013)

What emerges from the above is that while for CRBs their family situations gave them little choice but to enter a CRM, it offered them the possibility of escape from insecure dependence on extended family or, in Varsha's case, an alcoholic father.

3.9. Individual Attributes

For some of the CRBs who were the only ones of their sisters to be in a CRM, individual characteristics such as a physical disability, darker skin or a previous marriage made a marriage in their native states more difficult. Jameela (CRB, 21, Teli) talked to me about arranging a marriage for her sister's daughter (also a native of Jharkhand) in Barampur.

Her skin is much darker than mine. People [in Jharkhand] come and see her once and never return. Some have agreed in the past but they ask for ₹60,000-

70,000. My sister cannot give so much. Now we have no option but to get her married here because she is of marriageable age.

(9 June 2013)

A larger dowry was demanded as compensation for lacking what was regarded as a desirable attribute (lighter skin) for marriage. Kodoth (2008) makes a similar observation in her study of women in Kerala, where dowry came to be rationalised in cases where women had become over-age on account of what was considered a “deficit of normative femininity”, i.e., a lack of “healthy good looks” (2008: 264). This sheds light on marriage migration of women from Kerala to Haryana (Kaur 2012).

CRBs like Jameela (CRB, 21, Teli) asserted that the decision to marry in Barampur was her own. She explained:

I was married for three years in Godda [Jharkhand] and even had a child from that marriage. My first husband was an alcoholic and he used to beat me. My father brought me back. I had to leave my daughter. My parents wanted to get me remarried there but I did not agree. My in-laws’ home was in the same village as my natal home. I did not want to stay there; *sharm lagtī thī* [felt shame]. I would have had to fetch water from the same water tap and people would have gossiped about me. I decided that I will go away from there. At least no one here knows that I was married before.

(19 June 2013)

Like Jameela, Maya (CRB, mid 40s, Chamar) was separated from her first husband and did not want a second marriage in Bengal. Pushpa (CRB, late 30s, Jat) said that she had been left disabled following a childhood accident. Her mother asked her sister (also a CRB) to take her to *pardesh* and get her married. For these CRBs, while disability or a previous marriage made CRM the alternative, they weighed their options and exercised some agency in choosing that over their other limited options. As Kabeer points out, “choice necessarily implies the possibility of alternatives” (1999: 437).

3.10. “Deception”

Other CRBs denied any agency in marriage migration to UP. They told me that they had been deceived and brought to Barampur, either by a relative or someone

unknown to them. Devanti (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) told me that she was brought to Barampur by her mother's sister (a CRB) under the pretext of looking after her children. Her mother did not know until Devanti visited her natal home with her first child that she had been married off. Similarly, Sita (mid-40s, Chamar), also a CRB, talked about being brought by her *māsī's* [MZ] daughter to stay in Barampur for a few days but then being married off. She said: "When I realised that I was being married off, I thought to myself, what can I do now? I do not know the way to go back. She brought me here and trapped me" (14 October 2012).

Talking with Sita about her life in her native state revealed that she was widowed and had a son from that marriage. After her husband's death, her in-laws asked her to leave and kept her son back. Her parents had died, so she went to live at her *māsī's* (MZ) house. Her *māsī's* daughter was married in Barampur and she arranged Sita's marriage. The first time I met Sita she cried and talked about how difficult her life was – her husband was an alcoholic and did not work and feed the family. Kanchan (CRB, 21, Chamar) left home with her cousin sister [FeBD] who was intending to elope with a man from another Baghpat village, a truck driver who travelled to her native state. Kanchan was married to the truck driver's *bhābī's* younger brother [eBWYB], who is a resident of Barampur. She told me:

One day she [FeBD] asked me to go with her to the market to buy medicine for her brother. It got late and she took me to the station. I did not have money to go back home so I had to go with her. We travelled to Purnea [in Bihar]... then Delhi. When we reached Delhi she got married. Then I thought where will I go? I agreed to marry Ratan.

(27 September 2012)

While Kanchan, like Sita, suggested that she had no option but to get married, her husband told me that Kanchan was aware that she was leaving to get married when she left home. In the course of fieldwork, Kanchan told me that her father had remarried and she had a troubled relationship with her step-mother. She talked about how much she regretted running away, as she had no contact with her natal family. She was troubled by her *sās* [mother-in-law] and *jethānī* [HeBW] and felt that she did not have the support of her husband. In cases such as these, it is difficult to establish whether women made decisions to leave to escape difficult situations, yet

attempted to deny their agency and concealed that they had been lured with the promise of a better life as they now found themselves in unfavourable situations post-marriage.

Some studies place all CRMs in the category of trafficking (see Introduction). Whilst this is not the case, there were exceptional cases, such as Samita (CRB, early 30s, Chamar) who had been deceived and coerced and brought to Barampur. Samita told me her story:

I was studying in class five. One day I met a man outside my school. We were three girls. He told us, come with me I will make you meet my daughter. He drugged us....I do not remember. Then his wife and he put us on a train to Delhi. They threatened us that if we talk to anyone they will throw us on the railway track. We reached Delhi. He sold the other two girls before me. We were in Delhi for 10-12 days. We were moving all around the city. They would beat me if I talked to anyone. I tried to run away, but I could not. They sold me to him [husband] for ₹5,000. They had taken ₹15,000 for the other two girls.

(30 October 2012)

Samita was brought to Barampur in the early 1990s by someone unknown to her; by professional suppliers of brides, and “sold” without the knowledge of her kin (see 4.2).

Conclusion

CRMs are a consequence of two separate set of factors – one operating at source (bride-sending areas) and the other at destination (bride-receiving area). At destination, i.e., Barampur, the contemporary inability of some men to marry cannot be explained in terms of demographic factors alone, but is linked to wider changes in the political economy. Men are not all in the same position either with respect to their need to marry or the obstacles they face in trying to get married. The challenges that men face are differentiated by caste, class and individual characteristics – “various physical deformities” or “blemishes of individual character” (e.g. a “flawed” reputation). On account of such characteristics, men bear a “stigma” – “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (Goffman 1963: 3-4) and hence fail to be marriageable. Changes in landholding patterns, livelihood strategies, and caste differences in

livelihoods, education and white-collar employment have a significant bearing on men's ability to marry. The ability to convert economic and social capital (Bourdieu 1986, see Introduction) into salaried employment means that some men can marry easily while those with neither fail to marry or marry at older ages.

Men adopted different strategies in response to the difficulties confronting them. These included a relaxation in certain norms of marriage, payment to the parents of the bride instead of dowry, forms of exchange marriage and CRM. The Jats prefer bachelorhood over CRM, and hence there were (proportionally) more Jat bachelors in the village than the other castes. Among the Chamars and Kumhars, men were differentiated not only in terms of their need or ability to marry but also by their readiness to have a lesser marriage. Muslim men faced difficulties only in negotiating a secondary but not a primary marriage, and cases of CRM were exceptional among them.

At bride-sending states, poverty and the possibility of escaping dowry were the primary factors that explain why parents sent daughters in marriage to Barampur. Other explanations include: difficult family situations or insecure dependence on family members and the possibility of a better life and an escape from extreme poverty. Individual characteristics such as a previous marriage, physical disability or changing economic circumstances of the natal family (fathers passing away or natural calamities, for instance) were reasons offered by some CRBs. This also provides insights into why some women end up in CRM while their sisters are married in their native states. As far as agency in decisions regarding marriage in Barampur is concerned, for some CRBs it was entirely a parental decision, others were asked and agreed with the understanding that their families were too poor and remaining unmarried was not an option, others suggested that it was their own decision and they convinced family members to let them go, while some denied any agency by saying that they had been deceived and coerced and married off in UP.

CHAPTER FOUR: MAKING A CROSS-REGIONAL MARRIAGE

Much of the academic and activist interrogation of transnational marriages has been predicated on the assumption that the introduction of material calculations or commercial operations into the process of spouse-selection self evidently impugns the authenticity of the marital relationship. It is taken as transforming marriage from a domestic arrangement in the domain of kinship to a form of human “trafficking”.

(Palriwala and Uberoi 2008: 35)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined how men who fail to have a RM may resort to other less prestigious forms of marriage with CRM being one. I also delineated *why* women become CRBs. In this chapter, I address *how* women become CRBs. I begin by discussing who mediates CRM. I then move on to describe the payments involved in such marriages and how they “deviate” from RM arrangements (Chapter Two). I address whether CRM can be placed in the category of bride-price, bride-buying or trafficking or if they constitute a new kind of commercially-mediated marriage, as argued by earlier studies on CRM (see Introduction). In the last part of the chapter, I focus on rituals that are regarded as necessary within this regional context to provide social legitimisation to a marriage and how these influence local perceptions of whether CRMs are marriages at all.

4.1. Who Arranges? The Go-between or *Bīchwālā*

In Barampur, informants distinguished between the *bīcholīā* who mediated a RM and a *bīchwālā* for intermediaries in CRM. In her work on long-distance marriage migration in China, Davin writes: “Like other forms of migration, marriage migration generates ‘migration chains’. Marriage migration from one area to another can snowball as successive cohorts of brides arrange matches for their husbands’ kin or other villagers with women from their natal homes” (2008: 69). Similarly, Kaur in her work in Haryana found that many CRBs acted as go-betweens by accompanying aspiring grooms to their natal homes and getting marriages performed with sisters, cousins or neighbours’ daughters thereby creating fairly dense networks (2004:

2597). In Barampur, 12 of the 19 CRBs interviewed said that the *bīchwālā* was a CRB married in Barampur or another nearby village, or the husband of a CRB.

One CRB said that her marriage had been arranged by an army man posted in Assam (her native state). For another bride, a shopkeeper in her natal village had acted as a go-between for the marriage with her husband, a truck driver. For two brides, who had migrated into Baghpat villages to work with their families, the *bīchwālās* were brick-kiln owners. Others said that their marriages had been negotiated by a *rishtedār* [relative] or *jānkār* [acquaintance] – a “*behanoī*” [ZH], “*māmī*” [MBW] or “*phuphā*” [MZH]. In these cases, the go-between was not a “real” *māmī* or *behanoī*. Radha (CRB, early 40s, Chamar), for instance, told me that the *bīchwālā* was her *māmī*. I asked her if she meant her MBW and she responded: “*gaon kī*” [from the village]. When I asked her if they belong to the same village, she said no but that she was a relative of a relative of her *māmī*.

There were other cases, such as that of Pushpa (CRB, late 30s, Jat), where it was unclear who the *bīchwālā* was as contradictory accounts emerged. Pushpa told me that she was from Bihar and her sister was married in Muzaffarnagar and her *jījā* [ZH] arranged a marriage for her in Barampur. Sheela (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) said that both Pushpa and she had been brought to Barampur by Asha (55, Chamar, F) from Maharashtra. Sheela told me: “She lied to you. She must be afraid to tell you. Asha brought her *dhoke se* [through deception] as she brought me. She must be referring to Asha’s husband as *jījā*” (15 August 2013). Sheela points out that some CRBs, like her and Pushpa, had been deceived and brought to Barampur by someone unknown to them (see 3.10). For some CRBs, such as two “married” (see 4.3) to Chamar men, informants said that they had no information about who brought them and how they came to Barampur and that all they knew was that both brought a child with them when they arrived. Of them, when I talked to Chanda (early 40s, Chamar, F) she told me that her name was Rukhsana (she was a Muslim) before she came to Barampur. She said she was from “beyond *Chotā Patnā*” (it was unclear where this was) and that she had left home to look for her sister who had “run away to Delhi”. In Delhi, she met a man who brought her to Barampur.

Eleven of the nineteen CRBs said that their husbands went to their natal villages accompanied by the *bīchwālā* to get married. Seven CRBs talked about being deceived by the go-between. Renuka (CRB, 33, Chamar), for instance, said that her “sister” (MZD and go-between) lied to her family about her husband’s caste. Her father was told that her husband’s caste was *nāī* like them and not Chamar. When I first went to meet Malti (16, Chamar, F) she was a new bride and had arrived in Barampur two weeks earlier from Jharkhand. She told me that her husband was 26 years of age. Informants told me that he was in the early 40s and was previously married to a CRB who “left”. As I waited for Malti, I started a conversation with her mother-in-law. I asked her if they would go to work in the brick-kiln that year. She responded asking me to lower my voice and said: “She [Malti] does not know we are brick-kiln workers, do not tell her” (19 September 2012).

Likewise, Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) said that the *bīchwālā* told her father that her husband owned four acres of land when in fact he was landless. She added: “*Dūr hai* [it is far], so you believe all kinds of things about *pardesh*” [foreign land] (5 December 2012). Deception was common in RM as well (see 2.1), yet as Blanchet points out: “The distance involved in the long-distance marriages makes it easier to elaborate a fiction that cannot be checked beforehand” (2008: 170). There were some exceptional cases, such as that of Deepa (early 30s, Kumhar, F) for whom a male relative travelled from Jharkhand to Barampur before the marriage was fixed to confirm that her husband was not, like the *bīchwālā* for this marriage, a Muslim. For CRBs whose marriage ceremonies had taken place in their native states, a male relative came with them to Barampur to drop them following the wedding and stayed for a few days to ensure, in Lakshmi’s (CRB, late 40s, Kumhar) words: “That he [husband] had a house and family, he did not lie about anything and he would not sell me off to someone else” (2 April 2013). In RM, the bride was not accompanied by a male relative to her marital home following the wedding.

With the exception of one CRB, all said that they had been approached at least once by men/families of their own or other castes in Barampur to arrange a marriage for them from their native states. Eight said that they had refused. Radha (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) explained: “If I bring her and she is unhappy, she will curse me” (11

October 2012). Renuka (CRB, 33, Chamar) remarked: “The men here drink and gamble. There is no *sahī* [literally correct] *ādmī* [man] here” (30 October 2012). Two others said that they did not want to deceive anyone. Jaya (CRB, 45, Jat) told me: “She will become like us” (13 July 2013). She explained that she had not returned to visit her natal home for over 20 years (see Chapter Seven).

Nine other CRBs had arranged one or more marriages in Barampur or other villages. Some said that they did so because their husbands or in-laws asked them to. Meera (CRB, late 30s, Chamar) had arranged four marriages. “I thought why be the only one here, so I brought others”, she said (30 July 2013). Chhaya (CRB, 55, Kumhar) said: “I thought, *unkā bhī ghar bas jāyegā*” [their house would also become well-peopled and flourish] (12 March 2013). There were some who believed they were helping out women whose (natal) family circumstances were similar to their own. Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) told me about the CRB she brought: “Her parents had died, her family was poor” (27 July 2013). Kalawati had been in Barampur since the late 1980s. She had visited her natal home only once when she returned to arrange that marriage. Studies on CRM point out that arranging marriages serves as an incentive for CRBs to visit their natal homes without incurring any travel expenses (see 4.2) (Kaur 2012; Kukreja and Kumar 2013; Mishra 2013). While this may have been the motivation for some CRBs in Barampur, they did not offer this as an explanation for arranging marriages.

Kaur argues that CRBs who bring in other brides are not considered brokers because their motives are different – augmenting their own community and visiting their homes (2012: 87). In Barampur, however, some, like Asha (55, Chamar, F), functioned as brokers and benefitted monetarily in the process. About her, informants remarked: “*dhandā kartī hai*” [she runs a business] or “*dalālī kartī hai*” [she works as a broker]. In Barampur as well the term *dalālī*, as noted by Blanchet in her work in eastern UP, had a “negative connotation” that implied the use of “devious means, telling lies and cheating” (2008: 178). Sheela (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) told me:

Asha works with her mother in Maharashtra. She brings women from there *dhoke se* [through deception] like she brought me and then sells them to men in other villages. Three years ago she brought a young girl here. She must have been 14-15. I brought the girl to my house to drink tea. She came here

and started crying. She started talking to me in Marathi. She told me *mausi* [literally MZ but she meant Asha's mother] brought me here. Three days later she disappeared. Only God knows what Asha did with this young girl whether she sold her, she ran away, nobody knows what happened to her...If you talk to Asha, she will not tell you she does this work, even though everyone in the neighbourhood knows. She no longer sells them in Barampur but further away.

(21 September 2012)

Similarly, Kumhar informants told me about Deepa (early 30s, Kumhar, F), a CRB, who had arranged several marriages from her natal home in Jharkhand. Before I met Deepa, Pramod (21, Kumhar, M) told me that she would not talk to me as her motivations were different from mine. "You want *sudhār* [improvement] but she is only concerned about making money", he said (2 April 2013). Virender (52, Kumhar, M) also told me that in his opinion Deepa might be afraid to talk to me as I might report to the police about her "selling women". I did manage to speak with Deepa, unlike Asha (who refused), though only briefly as she seemed reluctant. Deepa told me that she had arranged only four marriages and suggested that she only did so as there was no other alternative for the women other than a marriage in Barampur. She talked about one marriage she arranged among the Jats.

This woman eloped with a Chuhra [Dalit] boy in her village. Her parents managed to bring her back but it would have been difficult for her to get married there. Her family was known to my natal family. They asked me so I got her married here.

(11 August 2013)

She added that she was now reluctant to arrange more marriages: "When I go to my natal village, parents of daughters ask me, where did you give our daughter? They [husbands] do not bring her back to meet us" (11 August 2013). This was also her response to Rani (my chaperon) when Rani asked Deepa to arrange a marriage for her brother. Deepa told me she visited her natal home in Jharkhand three to five times a year. The next time I returned to meet her after our first meeting, her daughter told me she had gone to her village to bring a bride. Deepa, like Asha, had made a business of arranging marriages, although she functioned in a different way from Asha in that she asked her natal kin to locate a woman in Jharkhand when she was asked to arrange a marriage. She or her husband then accompanied the groom to

her native village to have the wedding performed. Informants said that she charged a fee for arranging marriages, yet I never heard the word *dalālī* used for Deepa as it was for Asha.

4.2. A Marriage without Dowry: Bride-price or Bride-buying?

All the CRBs interviewed said that there was no dowry in their marriages. Chhaya (CRB, 55, Kumhar) remarked: “If my father could give a dowry, then why would I be here” (12 March 2013). In CRM, the groom met the expenses for the wedding, including the *dāwat* [feast], clothes that the bride wore and the travel-fare for the go-between as well as a male relative of the bride who accompanied her to Barampur after the wedding. Five CRBs talked about being taunted by their *sās* [mother-in-law] for coming empty handed from their natal homes. Jameela (CRB, 21, Teli), for instance, said: “Whenever there is a fight with my *sās*, she tells me, do not touch my utensils. You did not bring anything from your natal home” (19 June 2013). As discussed in Chapter Two, in Barampur, when a *mūh dikhāī* [face showing ceremony] took place following the wedding, the dowry that the bride had been given was displayed. Only six of the nineteen CRBs said that a *mūh dikhāī* ceremony had taken place when they first came to Barampur. Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) believed that this ceremony, a custom in Barampur, did not usually take place for CRBs as families wanted to avoid a situation where remarks would be made about the marriage being not only CR but also dowryless.

Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) commented: “Men go from here to marry and they spend on travelling there...it is expensive because it is far and they come here and tell others that they spent ₹10,000 or 20,000 and then people start saying: *woh mol ā rahī haī*” [she is a bought wife] (11 February 2013). What Kalawati points to, as also other CRBs, is that women like her were aware that they were referred to as *mol kī* [bought] by others in the village (see 8.3.1). Further, because men incurred expenses in getting married, it was believed that all CRBs were bought. I attempted to understand why CRBs were spoken of in this way. There were informants like Santosh (60, Jat, F) who spoke of a “market for women in the east”. She added: “Women are made to stand in a line and men go from here and take their pick and pay money to their parents” (29 October 2012). Ramesh (50, Kumhar, M) husband of

a CRB explained: “Here they think we give money to the bride’s parents but they did not take anything from us” (11 May 2013). In other words, whilst those in the village alleged that CRM entailed purchase, men/grooms in CRM denied that this was the case. As I discuss below, however, some men used the language of buying when they spoke about their CR wives.

The pertinent question here is: to whom are the payments made and what do they constitute? Unlike studies that argue that in most CRMs money is paid by the groom to a go-between for arranging the marriage (see Introduction), my findings highlight the complexities of marriage payments and the difficulties of placing them in one or the other category – brokered/commercially mediated, bride-buying, bride-price or trafficking.

In Barampur, husbands or in-laws of some CRBs clarified that what they had paid to the go-between was only *kharchā* [expenses]. They talked about handing over a certain amount of money to the *bīchwālā* and said that they had not been asked for a fee for arranging the marriage. CRBs who acted as go-betweens said that they had only been paid travel-fare. Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat), who had arranged one CRM, pointed out that it was assumed by others that the *bīchwālā* took money for arranging the marriage, even though it was used only to meet expenses.

Her [CRB’s] husband told people here that when we [Varsha and her husband] took him to Bengal to get married, we took a lot of money from him. You tell me, we stayed there at my parent’s home for one month...They gave him a place to stay and cooked whatever he asked for but how long could they feed three people for free?...They are poor. He would drink every day. How could they pay for his alcohol? So my husband asked him for money to meet his food and drinking expenses. We did not take any money from him for ourselves but we only asked him to pay our train fare.

(14 December 2012)

Yet in other cases, the *bīchwālā* had taken money from the groom for arranging the marriage. Jameela (CRB, 21, Teli) said that it was only after her *sās* [mother-in-law] taunted her fifteen days after the wedding saying: “*tujhe baich kar gaye*” [they sold you and left] that she learnt that her husband had paid ₹18,000 to the *bīchwālā* – a “*rishtedār*” [relative] (9 June 2013). She insisted that her father had no knowledge of this. Similarly, Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) talked about being told by her

husband that her natal kin “sold her” for ₹15,000. She said: “I would tell him [husband] my family took nothing, it was that *sonar*” [sonar is a caste name, but she meant the *bīchwālā*] (10 February 2013). While brides like Hemlata and Jameela stressed that their parents were unaware that the *bīchwālā* had taken a payment for them, informants in the village asserted that the *bīchwālā* kept part of the payment and gave some part to the parents. Some others like Ramesh (50, Kumhar, M), husband of a CRB, said he had paid ₹800 to Chhaya (go-between) to give to his wife’s parents to meet the wedding expenses. He said that his wife told him later that Chhaya gave only ₹30 to her parents and probably kept the rest for herself. When I talked to Chhaya, she told me that she had been given only travel-fare, as did some other CRBs. In such cases, it is difficult to say for certain whether the brides’ natal kin had received any payment or were even aware that a payment had been made to the go-between. Even in RM, making payments to an intermediary was not seen in a favourable light (see 2.2), as “material calculations” having entered the “domain of kinship” were seen as impugning the “authenticity of the marital relationship” (Palriwala and Uberoi 2008: 35).

There were other (exceptional) cases, such as Asha (55, Chamar, F) who informants said did *dalālī* [brokerage] or carried out a *dhandā* [business] in brides (see Section 4.1), at times selling and reselling them. Satender (55, Chamar, M) told me about his *tau*’s [FeB] son:

Asha brought him a bride in the mid-1980s for ₹2600. She stayed with him for a year. Then he took the money back from Asha and she sold this woman in another village. This was many years ago but she still does *dalālī*, taking ₹20,000 from some, ₹30,000 from others.

(31 March 2013)

Other informants stated that payments had been made not to the *bīchwālā* but to the bride’s parents. Abdul (30, Lohar, M) told me about his relative who married Faiza (CRB, late 40s, Lohar): “He gave ₹5000 to her parents, he told me himself”. When I questioned him further he added: “They used it on the *dāwat* [feast]” (10 May 2013). Similarly, talking about the CRB she brought to Barampur, Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) said:

They say here that her parents sold her for ₹5000. Her mother told her husband that she could not afford to get anything made for her daughter so she took money from him. She used the money to get a nose ring and earrings made and the remaining on the wedding feast. She even gave her some utensils and two sets of clothes. She brought everything with her to Barampur. Tell me then, what did her parents take from them?

(14 December 2012)

Others like Satvir (75, Jat, M) said that they had paid the bride's parents not to meet their expenses but in exchange for the bride. He told me:

When she went to visit her natal home for the first time after the wedding, she did not return for a long time. People in the village started saying to me, "your wife ran away. You are left a *randwā* [bachelor/never-married] again". So I would tell them: I will think that the buffalo that cost me ₹15000 died.

(17 December 2012)

The above suggests that whether the groom made payments to the *bīchwālā* (as expenses, fee or travel-fare) or to the bride's parents either to meet the wedding expenses or in exchange for a wife, from his perspective, he had incurred expenses instead of receiving a dowry and having the wedding expenses met by the bride's family, as in a RM.

CRBs were similar to RBs, who came without *dān dahej* [without a dowry negating the ideology of *kanyādān*] as this was seen as "sale" of a woman (see 2.4.2). Yet unlike in RM, this was not "hidden" and *mol kī* [bought wife] was one of the ways in which CRBs were referred to, even decades after being married in Barampur (see 8.3.1). Further, as I discuss in the following section, the assumption that a "proper" wedding did not take place contributed to the perception that CRBs were bought.

4.3. What Makes a Marriage a Marriage? Ritual and the "Legitimate" Marriage

Eleven of the nineteen CRBs said that a wedding that entailed the exchange of garlands, filling *sindūr* [vermilion in the parting of the hair] and/or *pherās* [circling of a fire] had taken place in their native states. Faiza (CRB, late 40s, Lohar) said that a *nikāh* [Muslim marriage ceremony] had taken place at her natal village. CRBs said that the wedding ceremony was followed by a *dawāt* [feast] in their natal village

attended by neighbours and relatives. The groom was accompanied by the *bīchwālā* [go-between] and in some cases a male relative. One CRB said that she had a “court marriage” [a registered/legal marriage] in her native village, while three other CRBs had a “court marriage” in Delhi or Baghpat town before they moved to live in Barampur. Of them, the husband of one told me that they neither had a ritual wedding nor a legal/registered one and that his wife was brought by the *bīchwālā* and they started living together.

Two others said that they exchanged garlands only after moving in Barampur. Of them, one bride said that following the garland exchange, she was taken to a photo studio in the nearest town where a photograph of the couple was taken. Other CRBs said that they did not have a wedding photograph, but five showed me a photograph taken a few months after the wedding. One CRB said that her wedding ceremony and the *dawāt* took place at her husband’s sister’s home in Delhi, while another bride said that she got married at her sister’s (also a CRB) *sasurāl* [marital/in-laws’ home] in a village in Muzaffarnagar (the neighbouring district). One Muslim CRB said that she had a *nikāh* [Muslim marriage ceremony] in Barampur with her brother and *māmā* [MB] present.

Deepa (early 30s, Kumhar, F), a CRB, told me that the commonly held assumption about CRM was that a wedding did not take place, “*aise hi le aye yā mol le aye*” [just like that they brought her or they paid for her, i.e., without getting married]. Other CRBs talked about being asked “how they got married” when they moved to live in Barampur. “Who gives away a daughter like that?” Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) remarked (15 December 2012), attempting to assert that she was given in marriage. Some, like Satender (55, Chamar, M), believed that when men first started bringing CRBs they were brought through deception. He added: “*par ab shādī kar ke lāte hai*” [but now they marry and bring them] (25 February 2013). Yet many believed that CRBs were brought “*aise hi*” [just like that, i.e., without a wedding]. When talking about her *sās* [mother-in-law] (a CRB), Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) said: “*mol ā rahī hai*” [she has come as a bought wife]. I asked her what she meant and she explained:

Shādī nahī huyī [there was no wedding]. They only exchanged garlands. A wedding is one where a groom goes with a *barāt* [wedding party]. Only after you take *pherās* [circling the sacred fire] can you be regarded married. I can put a garland around anyone's neck but that does not mean that I am married to him.

(5 April 2013)

Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) also stressed that the *pherā* is necessary to ensure that a couple is married in the eyes of other villagers, and she added: "A wedding is one where relatives and neighbours are invited" (19 November 2012). In Saroj's view (35, Jat, F), a CRM was one that was "*ritī rivāj ke binā*" [without rituals and customs] (7 June 2013). When speaking of CRBs among them, Muslim informants, however, did not contest that a *nikāh* [Muslim marriage ceremony] had taken place yet added that these were weddings that entailed payment. In Barampur, it was not only that people believed that a wedding had not taken place but that CRBs had come without the necessary rituals and customs for a marriage to be accepted as "genuine" or "legitimate" within this regional context, with the *pherā* [circling of the fire] regarded as the most significant and central ritual of the Hindu marriage ceremony. Other than its association with elopement (see Mody 2008), a "court marriage" was then a marriage without rituals and hence not regarded a "proper" marriage. Additionally, informants pointed out that RMs were witnessed by family and community. "The work of the witness is to change a private affair into a socially accepted institution that can be recognised and validated" (Maunaguru 2014: 261). For CRM, there was no way to ascertain who attended and witnessed the ceremony as it had taken place in a distant place with the grooms often going to marry unaccompanied by their kin. In local perception, CRMs were not marriages legitimised by ritual and community sanction. Yet CRBs were accorded the status of wives, mothers and daughters-in-law, as I discuss in Chapter Eight.

Conclusion

As in RM, where women played a role in bringing women as wives for men in their marital villages, most CRMs were mediated by other women who came to Barampur as CRBs. Yet some were mediated by other kinds of intermediaries that included shopkeepers, army men or brick-kiln owners. In exceptional cases, the go-betweens

were CRBs who functioned as brokers or traffickers who benefitted monetarily from the arrangement. CRM did not entail dowry. In fact, the wedding expenses were met by the grooms (instead of the bride's family as in RM). Such marriages were locally regarded as cases of bride-buying, based on the assumption that a payment had been made either to the bride's parents or simply that the groom had incurred expenses to obtain a wife. What also contributed to the assumption that CRBs were bought was that people believed that a wedding with the necessary rituals sanctified by community had not taken place. CRMs cannot be neatly fitted in one of the categories of bride-price, bride-buying, trafficking or a new form of commercially-mediated marriage involving payment to a go-between. The payments involved may entail only travel-fare or expenses paid to the go-between, a fee (brokerage) for negotiating the marriage, or a payment as expenses or in exchange for a bride to the parents or a combination of these.

In the preceding chapters, I have outlined, as has much of the literature on CRM, how CRMs are different from RMs, in that they do not conform to the "norms" of a RM, they involve different modes of arrangement and marriage payments and are the result of specific sets of factors operating in source and destination regions. Given this, what I will explore in the following four chapters is how women's (both CRBs' and RBs') lives are lived in the everyday context of marital and familial relationships within a context of poverty, caste and gender inequalities.

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MARRIAGE

CHAPTER FIVE: LIFE IN THE SASURĀL

...bahūs [daughters-in-law]...in their parents' village...find benefit (fāida), affection (mamtā), consideration (khayāl), succour (madad) and peace (ārām)... But in the susrāl, a bahū receives no indulgence (khātir) or appreciation (qadr)...

(Jeffery et al. 1989: 32)

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore how CRBs are placed within their *sasurāl* [in-laws'/marital home] as compared to RBs. For both, I begin by focusing on what the movement from *pīhar* [natal home] to *sasurāl* and adjustment in the *sasurāl* entails for all new brides. I then highlight how linguistic and cultural differences in addition to geographical distance, affect the process of adjustment for CRBs. I discuss the work that women do within the context of their everyday lives. As women leave their natal kin and move to live in their *sasurāl*, they start their married lives in households surrounded by strangers. I examine the relationships that women are able to create with other women (both within and outside the household) in their marital village and the support available to them. By focusing on these aspects, I highlight the diversity in women's experiences that are shaped not by distance or their CRB or RB status but primarily by factors of caste, class/poverty, household structure, age and widowhood.

5.1. From *Pīhar* [natal home] to *Sasurāl* [in-laws'/marital home]: The Process of Adjustment

What emerged in all my conversations with RBs when they talked about departing from their *pīhar* after the wedding was a feeling of *dūkh* [sadness] and tears at leaving *apnā ghar* [one's own home], parents, brothers and sisters. As Ritu (RB, 25, Jat) told me: "Once a woman gets married, her natal home becomes *parāyā*" [someone else's] (11 May 2013). In rural north India, women sing songs following the completion of the wedding ceremony that convey the sadness felt by the bride's kin at her separation from them (Jeffery and Jeffery 1996; Raheja and Gold 1994). Abha (RB, 25, Chamar) felt that once a woman gets married, she has no *adhikār* [rights] in her natal home and her natal kin no longer have any *adhikār* over her.

From then on, she can go to her *pīhar* only to visit and that too only if her in-laws allow her to.

Talking about their experiences at the *sasurāl* when they first moved to live there, RBs told me: “*Jī nahī lagtā*” [you do not like it], it felt “*ajīb*” [strange] and “I felt like running away”. They explained that while those in the *pīhar* are one’s own, in the *sasurāl* everything is new and everyone a stranger. Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar) remarked: “When I first came here, I did not feel like eating. I ate less than five *rotīs* [Indian bread] in five days. I did not like the taste of the water. It tasted bitter. I could not sleep because you have trouble sleeping in someone else’s home” (15 January 2013). Several informants talked about “*adjust karnā*” [to adjust] in the *sasurāl*, which seemed to have become common vernacular usage in this part of north India. Muneera (RB, 32, Lohar) pointed out that the burden of adjustment fell entirely on the new incoming bride because those in her *sasurāl* would not adjust to her. Kapur (1970) defines marital adjustment as a state of “accommodation in marital relationships”. She points out that it is the wife who is expected “to adjust, tolerate and sacrifice her personal interests for the happiness of the family” (1970: 21, 293; see also Tyagi Singh and Uberoi 1994).

RBs talked about how adjusting in the *sasurāl* entailed submitting to the authority of the husband’s kin, particularly senior women. In Kusum’s (RB, 47, Chamar) words: “In the *sasurāl*, a woman has to live *dab ke* [buried] by everyone” (25 February 2013). Within the patrilineal extended family, the authority structure is characterised by hierarchy on the basis of gender and age, that is, the subordination of female to male and junior to senior. Within the overarching authority of senior men there may be separate lines of control, wherein senior women exercise authority over daughters-in-law and daughters, and elder men over sons (Palriwala 2000: 672).

Shanti (RB, 24, Kumhar) felt that a *sās* [HM/mother-in-law] treats her daughter and daughter-in-law differently. RBs pointed out that they could tell their mothers if they did not want to work, but they could not do the same with their *sās*. In her *sasurāl*, a woman had to work, even when she was ill. When they first moved to their *sasurāl*, women said they had to ask how things had to be done. They feared being reprimanded by people in the *sasurāl*. Khalida (RB, 45, Teli) told me: “I was always

worried about doing something wrong or taking too long to finish the work. What if the salt in the food was too little?” (20 March 2013). She pointed out how a new bride had to adapt to the different food tastes of every member of the household. Women talked about life in the *sasurāl* in ways similar to those described by Jeffery et al. (1989) in their work in Bijnor district of UP, i.e., as a place where they received no “indulgence” or “appreciation”.

In her *pīhar*, a woman did not have to observe *ghūnghat* [veiling]. By contrast, in the *sasurāl* she could not go anywhere or talk to anyone and had to remain veiled in the presence of older males within and outside the household. A large body of literature has outlined how apart from veiling, *pārdā* entails restrictions on women’s movements and interactions outside the household, respect-avoidance within the home, certain kinds of feminine modesty behaviour such as soft speech, avoiding direct eye contact and assuming subservient postures (Jacobson 1982; Jeffery 1979; Papanek 1982; Sharma 1978 a; Vatuk 1982). *Pārdā* varies according to a woman’s caste and class status, but also with age and stage in her married life with young brides being the most constrained. Women conformed due to fear of the ridicule, gossip and violence that non-conformity invited. Older women accepted “surrogate patriarchal roles” in their surveillance of younger brides (Sangari 1993: 871) as they enforced conformity to standards of “appropriate” behaviour. In Barampur, apart from displaying deference towards older men, young married women were expected to greet senior female affines through the practice of *pāon parnā* [touching the feet/pressing the lower legs].

RBs then, contrasted the freedom they had in their *pīhar* with the restrictions of the *sasurāl*. Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) told me: “Once a woman gets married, she becomes like a buffalo tied to a tethering post” (18 November 2012). About her first months in her *sasurāl*, Aarti (RB, 27, Chamar) said that she felt she was “*qaid mein*” [in detention] and talked about feeling like a “trapped bird” (12 February 2013). Likewise, Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) felt that *ghūnghat* was a *sazā* [punishment]. Informants added that over time it became a habit.

Like RBs, CRBs talked about the sadness they felt when they left their homes and parents to live in Barampur in their husbands’ homes. “*Jī nahī lagtā*” and “you have

to work in the *sasurāl*”, they told me, just as RBs did. For CRBs, however, marriage entailed not only movement from *pīhar* to *sasurāl* over a very long-distance (see Appendix Three), but additionally adjustment in a linguistically and culturally different region. Their experiences in the early months at their *sasurāl* was thus also shaped by where they came from, that is, their regional identity. Renuka (CRB, 33, Chamar) told me about the move to Barampur: “It was a *dūsrā ghar, dūsrā gāon aur dūsrā desh* [another home, another village and another country]” (4 December 2012).¹² For Chhaya (CRB, 55, Kumhar), it was “*pardesh*” [a foreign land] and “*alag*” [different]. She added: “I did not know where I have come, what kind of a place this is” (12 March 2013). Others like, Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat), shared how she felt helpless as she fathomed the distance she had travelled that separated her from her natal kin. She told me: “I would sit by myself and cry. I wondered if I will ever be able to see my parents again” (30 January 2013). This was a concern RBs did not share, as I discuss in Chapter Seven.

As RBs and CRBs alike moved to live in their *sasurāl* as new brides, they found themselves isolated amongst strangers. In their *sasurāl*, all brides found themselves in a position in which they could not readily capitalise on the “social capital” (Bourdieu 1986, see Introduction) of childhood relationships. They were flung into a new situation, finding themselves at the bottom of domestic hierarchies. As unmarried women they did not have much power, yet they had more allies in their *pīhar* that they could rely on than in their *sasurāl*. As new brides, their mobility was extremely restricted, so they could not build new “social capital” by establishing supportive relationships with those outside of the household (see 5.3).

Nine of the 38 women (CRBs and RBs) talked about how the process of adjustment in the initial years of marriage, when they lived in joint households, was made more difficult because of constant fights in the *sasurāl* and taunts and complaints from their in-laws about dowry, work etc. For RBs, however, this transition was eased by frequent visits that they made to their *pīhar* in the first/early years of marriage. By contrast, CRBs’ isolation was intense as they could not avail themselves of such

¹² The literal translation of *desh* is country but what is implied here is that the place she married into was foreign – strange and unfamiliar.

visits (see 7.2). Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) explained how different and alienating life in Barampur felt:

The first one year was very difficult. I felt alone. I could not understand the language. In Silchar [Assam] we ate rice three times a day but here they eat *rotī* [Indian bread] for all meals. When I came here, I could not eat *rotī* because cowdung cakes were used to make them. In Silchar we used wood to cook. Here they cook on a *chulhā* [open stove fuelled by dung cakes]. I did not know how to make *rotī* on the *chulhā*. Here they did not use soap to wash hair or clothes but used *multānī mittī* [soil] instead. There women wore *sārīs*. Here they wear suit-salwar or a long shirt with a *dhotī* [sārī]. There they do not observe *ghūnghat* [veiling]. I did not know how to use a hand-pump for drawing water. It took me more than one year to get used to everything here.

(11 February 2013)

In sum, adjustment for CRBs entailed learning a new language and adopting the way of life, dress and food habits of the community where they were married, also noted by earlier studies (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Kaur 2004). Like Kalawati, other CRBs talked about having to dress in suit-salwar instead of a *sārī* worn by married women in their native states. Even as new brides, two CRBs were not allowed by their in-laws to wear a blouse but were made to wear a long shirt with a *sārī*, usually worn by older women. Two Bengali CRBs talked about how they were wearing a set of white conch-shell bangles framing a red one, as worn by married women in Bengal, when they first came to Barampur. They were asked to remove them. CRBs, then, had to let go of all markers of their pre-marital identity. Some CRBs were given new names more suited to the region they married into. CRBs married to Hindu men also talked about fasting on *karvā chauth* [A one-day festival celebrated by Hindu women in north India where women fast from before sunrise to moonrise for the long lives of their husbands]. This was not a festival they celebrated in their native states. Sheela (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) talked about Ganesh Chaturthi that she celebrated in her native state (Maharashtra). She told me: “I cannot celebrate the festivals we do there because no one here does” (15 August 2013).

Two CRBs, both married to Chamar men, were Muslim before they came to Barampur. Both said that their husbands had never asked them either to wear *sindūr* [vermilion in the parting of the hair worn by Hindu women that serves as a signifier of their married status] or to fast on *karvā chauth*. They had, however, to give up

their religious practices and undergo a name change to conceal their pre-marital Muslim identity. Of them, Samita (CRB, early 30s, Chamar) told me that she continued to perform *namāz* for three years after she got married without the knowledge of her husband, but stopped after the birth of her son. Thus, for these CRBs, the experience of adjustment was shaped not only by their regional origins but also by their pre-marital religious identity.

Ghūnghat [veiling] was an adjustment that CRBs and RBs alike had to make. The difference between CRBs and RBs experiences of adjusting to *ghūnghat*, however, was that the former had to be told what it entailed and before whom it had to be observed because *ghūnghat* was not a practice in their native states. I watched Kanchan (CRB, 21, Chamar) in the first few months after her wedding and saw how the *ghūnghat* always slipped off her head. On one occasion when I went to speak with her, she came to the courtyard with her husband Ratan, veiling from me. I asked her why she was doing so and to that Ratan responded: “She will keep *ghūnghat* from you but not when she should” [pointing at the elderly men sitting outside across the street, suggesting that she did not understand the rules of *ghūnghat*] (14 October 2012). Sheela (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) talked about when she first came to Barampur, and how she wondered why women covered their faces but left their chests uncovered. In her native state (Maharashtra), she added, it was necessary for a woman to cover her chest.

For five CRBs, having to learn the language was the most difficult adjustment. Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) told me:

Before I came here, I was worried how I will talk to my husband. And my sister, who is married in Etah [a district in UP], was also worried about the same thing, but somehow both of us could speak Hindi. In Bengal, we learnt Hindi by watching Hindi films. Sometimes I think it was destiny that both of us married in UP could understand Hindi and my younger two sisters cannot...When I first came here, I could not understand the language because I was used to the Hindi of Bollywood films. The language here is different.

(21 November 2012)

Varsha talks about the language in Barampur being different from Hindi because not only is the Hindi spoken in rural areas different from that of Bollywood films but

also because of the regional dialect that is spoken in Barampur. Abha's (RB, 25, Chamar) *pīhar* was in Meerut city and even she talked about facing some difficulties with understanding the dialect when she first moved to Barampur. While all CRBs had to learn the language, the process was longer and more difficult for some than for others because they could not even speak Hindi when they first came to Barampur. It was easier for brides from Jharkhand and Bihar compared with those from West Bengal and Assam. For Jaya (CRB, 45, Jat) the interpreter between her husband and her had been her sister, who was married in Barampur three years before Jaya was married. Lakshmi (CRB, late 40s, Kumhar) said that her husband communicated to her what those in her *sasurāl* were saying. She explained: "When they asked me for *pānī*, I thought to myself, what is *pānī*? My husband lifted a glass, filled water in it and showed me. I then understood that they meant water" (4 April 2013). Of the 19 CRBs interviewed, 13 told me that they had learnt "*yahā kī bhāshā*" [the language of "here", meaning Barampur] and that they could no longer speak their native language. What also became evident was that CRBs could speak or not speak their native language depending on the frequency of their contact with their natal kin, which varied for each bride (see Chapter Seven).

Another adjustment that CRBs had to make was with regard to food. They pointed out the difference between Barampur and their native states: "Here they eat *rotī*, there we ate rice". Eight CRBs, however, said that they continued to cook and eat rice in Barampur, some more frequently than others. They also talked about the different vegetables or pulses they ate in their natal states. With regard to food, what seemed to be a more difficult adjustment for brides married to Jat and Kumhar men was that CRBs had to adopt a vegetarian diet instead of one that included meat and fish in particular that formed a part of their everyday diet in their native states. Muslims and Chamars were non-vegetarian, unlike most Jats and Kumhars in Barampur. Thus, adjusting to different food tastes was more difficult for brides married among the latter two castes.

The above discussion demonstrates that marriage for all women entailed acquiring, a new "habitus" (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, see Introduction). New brides internalised forms of behaviour and practices in the *sasurāl* and transitioned from feeling that

some behaviours or bodily processes were new or foreign to feeling that they had become “habitual” or second-nature. CRBs and RBs alike to some degree or other underwent a re-socialisation process – learning to do *ghūnghat* or adjusting to new food tastes and learning new skills related to work (see 5.2). Yet the process of adjustment for CRBs was harder than it was for RBs as they had to adopt the way of life of a different region.

5.2. Women’s Work

In this section, I will discuss the work that women do alone and with men, but focus primarily on the work that women share with other women, an aspect that has not been discussed in the western literature on domestic labour. This literature focuses mainly on the household division of work, including childcare, between men and women (e.g. Bianchi et al. 2012) or acknowledges the joint domestic labour of other members of the household (older children and youths) but within the context of a nuclear household (e.g. Gershuny and Sullivan 2014). In contexts such as this, with different residential units (mainly non-nuclear), there exists a gendered division of labour between men and women but also a division of labour between women that is not fixed but shifts over the course of a woman’s life, with seniority being crucial. I will highlight that the nature of and decisions regarding women’s work are determined not by where they came from, whether they were CRBs or RBs, but by a range of other factors discussed below.

In Barampur, CRBs and RBs alike distinguished between *ghar kā kām* [housework] and *bāhar kā kām* [outside work]. Cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and utensils were described as household work. Cattle work (milking the cattle, cutting the fodder and making cow dung cakes) was also included in housework. Going to the fields to fetch fodder for the cattle, wood for cooking and fetching/drawing water from the public tap were included in outside work. Women, though primarily responsible for childcare, did not talk about it as work.

Some studies on CRM argue that more demands are made on the labour of CRBs than on RBs. In her work on Bangladeshi wives in eastern UP, Blanchet (2008) describes the case of a bride married to a man much older than her, who supported

three children and an elderly husband who was unfit to work. Her husband owned less than half an acre of land when he married her but, owing to her hard work, he owned thrice the amount 16 years later. Similarly, in their work on CRM in Haryana and Rajasthan, Kukreja and Kumar claim that excessive demands were made on the labour of CRBs. They argue that the absence of kin support made it difficult for CRBs to resist the “abuse” of their labour (2013: 49). Further, they write that in their day-to-day lives CRBs were even excluded from decisions about what to cook or eat. They lived in a state of “self-imposed isolation” because they were considered “inferior” to “local women” and preferred to collect firewood or water separately, instead of with other women (2013: 54).

As discussed earlier, CRBs talked about how they could cook before they came to Barampur but had to learn how to cook different kinds of food. They had to learn how to make *rotī* on the *chulhā*. They also had to be taught how to do cattle-work and make cowdung cakes. Learning this work was an adjustment that CRBs had to make, but none of my CRB informants linked their workloads to their CR status. Also, they did not feel that they had ever been excluded from collective activities (such as fetching firewood or water) by other RBs.

The structure and composition of the household had a significant bearing on the amount and kinds of work that women did. Most women started their married lives living in a *sanyukt* [joint] household with their *sās* [mother-in-law] and later on became *alag* [separate/nuclear], usually when their husbands’ brothers got married and had children. The separation was marked by the *bahū* [SW/daughter-in-law] establishing a separate *chūlhā* – cooking independently. In some cases, women remained joint with their *sās* as their husbands had no brothers (See also Jeffery et al. 1989: 49-54). In joint households, work was shared with other women – *jethānī* [HeBW], *sās*, *devrānī* [HyBW] and unmarried *nanad/s* [HZ], even though *bahūs* [daughter-in-law] remained responsible for most of the work.

Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) lived in a joint household with her *sās* and unmarried *nanad*. She said her *sās* did nothing, while she herself was responsible for sweeping and moping the floors, washing utensils and clothes and cooking. Her *nanad* helped her with making *rotīs*. Radha (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) said that when she lived

jointly with her *devrānī* [HyBW] in the early years of marriage, her *devrānī* took over tasks such as making *rotī* that Radha found difficult to do. Sheela (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) had been in Barampur for almost 30 years. She told me that she could still not make *rotī* on the *chulhā*, a task she previously left to her *jethānī* [HeBW] and now to her *bahū* [daughter-in-law].

Six informants (RB and CRB) claimed that even though work was shared (with other women) in joint households, they had more work when they lived jointly than after they set up nuclear households. “You have to cook for more people”, was one example they gave me. These informants had previously lived in large joint families before they became *alag* [nuclear] in contrast to those like Munesh (RB, 38, Kumhar) who lived jointly only with her widowed *sās* till she died. She pointed to the benefits of joint living, saying that when she was ill, for instance, she could rely on her *sās* but now she had no other choice but to work as she was without help. Older informants, particularly in Jat households, talked about how they helped their *bahūs* [daughters-in-law] with cattlework – milking the cattle and making dung cakes, even though they no longer helped their *bahūs* with the housework (cooking, cleaning etc.).

Seven informants (CRB and RB) talked about leaving children in the care of their *sās* while they took care of the work. I also observed that women were often helped by young girls in the neighbourhood, especially with infants. Husbands helped occasionally, but childcare was primarily women’s responsibility as was all other household work. Whilst work was generally shared by women in joint households, there were cases, such as that of Shanti (RB, 24, Kumhar) who lived jointly with her *sās* and yet was entirely responsible for work. On one occasion, I watched her struggling to do the housework while simultaneously watching her four children and a crying infant. She told me:

There is never a time during the day when I can sit and rest on the cot. I work the entire day. I wake up in the morning at 5 a.m., make tea and cook, then I get two children ready for school, then I cook again, wash utensils and sweep, then I wash clothes. By then it is late afternoon and I start cooking the night meal. You can see my children are so young, my work never gets finished - one will go to the toilet, one has to be bathed and one never stops crying. No one helps me. My *sās* only helps me sometimes to make *rotīs*. If my *nanad*

[HZ] was as troubled with her children and had as much work, I know that my *sās* would have done everything to help her.

(13 March 2013)

Sarla (RB, 47, Jat), like Shanti, shared how she received no help with work from other women in her *sasurāl*. In her opinion, this was a way for senior women to assert their power over daughters-in-law. She explained: “A *sās* feels that if she faced so much difficulty as a young bride, then her daughter-in-law must face the same. If she had to work in the fields, take care of the cattle and do all the housework, then her daughter-in-law should have to do the same” (14 August 2013). The burden of work, then, fell on the *bahūs* [daughters-in-law], who were at the bottom of the domestic hierarchy. Ritu (RB, 25, Jat) explained how her *jethānīs* [HeBW] troubled her during her initial months at her *sasurāl*, by making her do all the housework when her *sās* left the house to go to the field to work. Ritu was the youngest of the three *bahūs* of the household. Her *jethānīs*, while not yet senior women, came to enjoy some power vis-à-vis the new bride in the household hierarchy.

In nuclear households, as brides with young children, women were solely responsible for housework, but once a daughter turned 12-13, she started helping with and gradually took over the housework. Once the older daughter got married, the second one became old enough to do the work. Informants with adolescent daughters (CRB and RB alike) told me that they were “free” of housework. Three RBs continued to help their elderly *sās* with their housework even after becoming *alag* [nuclear]. Thus, in most cases, when women grew older their workload reduced as they were helped by daughters or daughters-in-law. For some informants, such as Jagmati (RB, early 60s, Chamar), however, (older) age did not lessen her workload: she was a widow living in a nuclear household with her two unmarried sons. The burden of housework fell entirely on her. Here the composition of the household had a more significant bearing on work than her age. Men usually did not help women with *ghar kā kām* (cooking, cleaning, washing utensils and clothes or making cowdung cakes) but some did help with or take responsibility for cutting fodder or milking the cattle (see also Lyon 1988).

After childbirth, women said that they were not expected to work for a forty day period, although they did not usually get respite from work for this length of time. As women delivered at their *sasurāl*, I was also told that during this period, the *nanad* [HZ] was called from her *sasurāl* to help with the work. Some informants were indeed helped by a married or unmarried *nanad*. Others, however, pointed out that some times either the married *nanad* was unable to come or could stay only a few days because she had household responsibilities of her own, was ill or had very young children. Four informants said that they were helped by their *sās*, while one relied on her *devrānī* [HyBW]. One informant said that her *sās* helped only after the birth of her son but not her daughters. It was her husband who did the work after her daughters were born. Another respondent did not have a *nanad*, her *sās* had died and her *devrānī/jethānī* [HyBW/HeBW] had refused to help. She said that she called an unmarried girl from her *pīhar*. Two other informants relied on older female natal kin. Four brides were helped by their older children when younger children were born and also had some help from their husbands (See also Jeffery et al. 1989: 153-8). It was regarded as shameful for a woman to visit her natal home once her pregnancy became visible or to deliver there. In exceptional cases of conflict in the *sasurāl* and absence of any support from other women, however, a woman went to her *pīhar* for the delivery, as did two of my RB informants (see 7.4).

As far as *bāhar kā kām* [outside work] was concerned, new brides (whether CRB or RB) were not sent out to fetch fodder, firewood or water or to buy household provisions. In joint households, usually the *sās* went out and if the *sās* was not alive, the *sūsar* [HF/father-in-law], husband or *jeth* [HeB]. In some cases, young brides were sent out, but always accompanied by older women. In nuclear households, the *bāhār kā kām* was done by husbands in the early years of marriage. After children grew older, women started going out, especially if they lived in nuclear households.

Apart from age/years of marriage, factors such as widowhood affected a woman's work. Abha (RB, 25, Chamar), for instance, was a young widow. She did all the *bahār kā kām* with her unmarried *nanad* because her household comprised only her four children, her elderly widowed *sās* and her unmarried *nanad*. Ordinarily, young brides like Abha would not be sent out to fetch firewood or fodder but her widowed

status and the composition of her household (only adult women and very young children) offered no alternative. Most Jat households owned cattle, but not all among the four other castes (Chamar, Kumhar, Teli and Lohar) did, so not all households required fodder. Also, in most Jat households, the men brought fodder from the fields for the cattle. In several households, particularly among the Jats and Lohars, food was cooked using gas cylinders. Thus, some households did not use firewood or dungcakes.

Bāhār kā kām also included paid work outside the household and, in the case of Jat women, agricultural work on the family fields. Jat informants told me that the number of Jat women involved in agricultural work had decreased over the years, apart from a few weeks during wheat harvesting. They attributed this largely to mechanisation. It also became evident that with an increasing number of Jat girls pursuing higher education, they were less inclined to be involved in agricultural work. Caste, class and age were significant in determining women's involvement in paid work. Some Teli, Kumhar and Chamar women worked as agricultural labourers on Jat fields for some part of the year. Some Chamar and Kumhar women also worked in Jat households as sweepers or helped with cattlework for a wage. With the exception of Chamar women who worked in the brick-kilns from the first year of marriage, women usually became engaged in paid work only at a later stage in their married life, as their mobility increased. Sometimes compulsion of poverty forced women to go out to work from the early years of marriage, however.

Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar), explained that she worked in the fields of Jat farmers and as payment received fodder for her cattle. She told me that she worked the entire day and even though she did it “*apnī marzī se*” [of her own will], her family could not be sustained if she stopped working. Her husband worked as a potter for part of the year and in the brick-kiln for the other part. She said that it was not possible for them to feed their six children with her husband's earnings alone. As their family grew, it became essential for her to go out to work. She told me: “Some women are *dūkhī* [unhappy] and some *sūkhī* [happy]. I am neither *sūkhī* nor *dūkhī*. I am medium. I am not *sūkhī* because I cannot feed my children without working and I am not *dūkhī* because at least my family is not starving” (11 February 2013).

Due to status concerns, Jat and Lohar women were not usually employed outside the home for a wage, although there were exceptions such as Kajri (RB, 35, Jat), a landless widow with eight children. Like Kalawati, poverty and (additionally for her) widowhood compelled her to go out to work. She worked as a sweeper, washed utensils and made cowdung cakes in three Jat households. She told me: “If my husband was alive, I would not go out to work. We are Jat. Nobody in the village talks about me. They know that I have to work because of *majbūrī* [compulsion]. If I do not work, how will I feed my children?” (22 October 2012). In this case, class and widowhood and not caste status were determining in decisions regarding work.

Due to compulsions of poverty and caste, those RBs and CRBs who were married to Chamar brick-kiln workers, also worked in the brick-kilns with their husbands from the first year of marriage. RBs whose natal kin were brick-kiln workers had worked in the brick-kiln before marriage and already knew how to do the work. Others, like Kusum (RB, 47, Chamar), however, shared how she had to learn how to do the work since her natal family had never worked in the brick-kiln. She talked about the first time she went to the brick-kiln, when she stayed for only two months. She was constantly taunted by her in-laws as she struggled to do the work and was sent back to her *pīhar*. She said that she had been troubled throughout her married life because of this work and felt helpless as there seemed no escape. “My children were born at the brick-kiln and now they all work there”, she remarked (3 February 2013). Like Kusum, learning to do brick-kiln work was a very difficult adjustment that CRBs had to make. Radha (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) told me: “I had not even seen a brick-kiln in my dreams until I came here” (13 October 2013).

CRBs and RBs shared with me the hardships they experienced in brick-kiln work shaped both by their caste and gender identities. They had to work very long hours and unlike men, they had childcare and other responsibilities (cooking, cleaning and washing). Renuka (CRB, 33, Chamar) talked about the health problems she developed because of brick-kiln work as it was *bhārī kām* [heavy work]. She said: “This work is for *tākatdār ādmī* [physically strong people], *hum toh kamzor hai, toh lācharī hai*” [we are weak so we are helpless] (4 December 2012). Samita (CRB, early 30s, Chamar), had a miscarriage during the sixth month of pregnancy while

working at the brick-kiln. Other informants also talked about the difficulties of working in the brick-kiln during pregnancy. Women (CRB and RB alike) who gave birth to children at the brick-kiln talked about having to resume work as soon as ten days after childbirth because of the advance that had to be repaid to the brick-kiln owner.

As far as control over the income that women earned from outside employment was concerned, nine informants (CRB and RB alike) said that whatever they earned went into meeting household expenses. One informant had to hand over whatever she earned to her husband and three said that they kept what they earned and had never been questioned by husbands on how they spent it. Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar), for instance, used her earnings to buy gifts for her married daughter when she visited, since Kalawati's husband refused to give her the money to do so.

In sum, while CRBs had to acquire new work-related skills, the workload they had or the decisions regarding work were determined not by their CR status but by a range of other factors – seniority, poverty, widowhood and household composition – that were determining for RBs as well.

5.3. Support in the *Sasurāl*: Relationships with Other Women

Village studies note that women construct fictive kin relationships with other women in their affinal villages with whom they are able to trace ties back to their natal villages (Lambert 1996; Raheja and Gold 1994). In her work in a village in north-western India, Sharma noted that a young bride was encouraged to establish bonds with another young wife (belonging to her natal village) who became a “ritual sister” and provided her moral support as she got used to life in her new household and village (1978 b: 276). In her work on women's life stories in a Kangra village (north-west India), Narayan found that when women of more or less equal castes and ages gathered together they “exchanged confidences” about events in their lives. They described this practice as “performing sorrows and joys” (2004: 229). Sharma argued that it was young and not older women who sought to establish friendships with other women outside the household. Older women, she found, sought moral and material support from their sons and at times their sons' wives, rather than from other women

(1978 b: 277). In Barampur, however, as I discuss, age and seniority as well as household structure were crucial in determining the relationships that women (CRBs and RBs alike) could establish with other women, both within and in other households in their in-law's village. I begin by discussing relationships between women within the household.

Nine informants talked about how, when they first moved to live in their *sasurāl*, the separation they felt from their natal kin was exacerbated by the treatment they received from their in-laws, particularly their *sās* [mother-in-law]. Pushpa (CRB, late 40s, Jat) said: "My *sās* troubled me a lot. She would not give me food to eat or clothes to wear...I would work all day, yet she would fight with me and tell my husband that I do not do any work" (30 July 2013). Likewise, Kusum (RB, 47, Chamar) talked about how her *sās* constantly complained about how she did not do enough work and always compared her to her *jethānī* [HeBW] who received favourable treatment from her *sās*. She told me: "When my *jethānī* or her children were ill, my *sās* would take them to get treated but if I fell ill, I was sent to my *pīhar*. They did not want to spend on my treatment" (14 February 2013). Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) said that her in-laws took back the jewellery they had given her for the wedding, including the *mangalsūtrā* [a necklace that a Hindu groom ties around a bride's neck during the marriage ceremony that serves as a symbol of a woman's marital status]. Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) had a similar experience. She told me that there were fights in her household from the start. After she came to Barampur, her *sās* gave her silver earrings and a necklace. A few weeks later she took them back from her.

Women talked about the difficulties they faced not only with their *sās* but also their *jethānīs* [HeBW] when they lived jointly with them. Kanchan (CRB, 21, Chamar) told me:

My *jethānī* [a widow] was living at her *pīhar* but she returned 20-25 days ago. Till she came back, Ratan [husband] was very good to me, as was my *sās*. Ratan had never beaten me. Since she [*jethānī*] came, she is always complaining about me to him and *khūb pītā hai* [he beats me a lot].

(28 September 2012)

A few months later she told me: “Here there is no one who supports me. The women around are all in relation of *jethānī* to me. They all talk about getting me beaten. No one here can save me” (25 February 2013). Parvati (CRB, 45, Kumhar) talked about how her *jethānī* (also a CRB) provoked Parvati’s husband to beat Parvati. Interestingly, both Parvati and her *jethānī* were married and moved to live in Barampur on the same day. They were both new brides yet her *jethānī* adopted a position of power available to her in the absence of a *sās* (who had died) or another senior woman in the household.

Three informants, now senior women of their households, talked about the troubled relationships that they had with their own daughters-in-law. Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) remarked: “She does not want to give me even a glass of water” (15 December 2012). Women also talked about how their relationships with their sons had changed after they got married. Sheela (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) commented about her son: “*Yeh toh bāhū kā ho gayā*” [he is his wife’s now] (30 September 2012). Every time I visited her, she criticised her daughter-in-law and said that her arrival into the household was followed by misfortune for their family. Sheela talked about her own *sās*, how she would verbally abuse and provoke Sheela’s husband to beat her. Sheela’s daughter-in-law, Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) said the same about Sheela. She said that she was beaten by her husband only when he was provoked by Sheela.

Women like Sheela, who had suffered mistreatment at the hands of their *sās*, now mistreated their own daughters-in-laws: women “bargain” with patriarchy as senior women because they have “an actual stake in certain positions of power available to them” (Kandiyoti 1998: 143). Moreover, securing the son’s loyalty over his wife to ensure old-age support was a primary concern (Kandiyoti 1988). Thus, whether CRBs or RBs, as they progressed in their marital lives, all women were incorporated into household hierarchies and hoped that eventually they would come out on top. Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) pointed out how a *sās* did not allow (supportive) relationships to develop between young daughters-in-law. She told me that her *devrānī* [HyBW] was ill-treated like she was, but they were not allowed even to talk to each other and they were both beaten if they did.

In conversations with women it emerged that self-interest was also a motivation for women to oppress other women. Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) talked about being beaten by her husband on the provocation of her *jethānī* [HeBW]. She felt that her *jethānī* wanted Hemlata to leave because she had had a relationship with Hemlata's husband since before Hemlata's arrival in Barampur. Hemlata added that her *jethānī* was also unhappy with the marriage because Hemlata's husband handed his earnings to the *jethānī* before he was married. Similarly, Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) said that she was ill-treated by her husband's *chāchī* [FyBW] because she had a relationship with Sarla's husband and was hoping that her [FyBW] children would inherit Sarla's husband's land. Urmila (RB, 32, Jat) shared her experience:

After the wedding, I came to stay at my *sasurāl* for three days. Usually a woman does not have relations with her husband until after the *gaunā* [cohabitation] but my *sās* sent my husband to me at night. I was only 15 at the time. My parents had agreed to send me only a year or two later but I got pregnant. I could have stayed at my *pīhar* for a year if my husband had not come to me. My *sās* sent my husband to me because it was her way of ensuring that my parents left me at my *sasurāl* because there was no one here to cook and do the housework.

(28 May 2013)

What this demonstrates is, as Sharma notes, women of different generations had different interests that made it unlikely that they would unify as women “to form a solidarity group” (1978 b: 277). Yet not all women shared this experience. For some such as Abha (RB, 25, Chamar), a young widow, her experience of marriage/widowhood was largely shaped by the support she had from her *sās* and *nanad* [HZ]. She talked about the dispute she had with her *jeths* [HeB] and *devars* [HyB] over her deceased husband's share of parental property. Abha said that if it had not been for her *sās*, who supported her and not her own sons, she would have lost what rightfully belonged to her children and would have had to return to her *pīhar* [natal home]. She added: “There is a lot of love between me, my *nanad* and *sās*. I do not have a mother, but I have always thought of her [*sās*] as my mother” (19 December 2012). Likewise, Jameela (CRB, early 20s, Teli) said that she never felt alone in Barampur, even though her natal kin were far away, because she had the support of her *jethānīs* [HeBW] who sided with her in all conflicts with their *sās* and she reached out to in times of difficulty (e.g. illness).

Women also talked about supportive relationships they could develop with other women outside the household in their marital village. These were not necessarily women with whom they had previous natal kin ties, as noted by other studies (and discussed earlier) but were women of their own caste or other castes with whom they shared *sūkh dūkh* [joys and sorrows]. Urmila (RB, 32, Jat) talked about relying on her Jat neighbour (also an in-married woman) for financial support.

Whenever my *sās* went out I would go to the roof and talk to her [neighbour] about everything. If I told her that I was troubled because my husband did not give me money to buy provisions for the house, she would lend me money. I used to sell milk so I would pay her back as and when I had the money.

(29 May 2013)

Maya (CRB, mid-40s, Chamar) told me: “My natal family is not with me but there are many here who support me. When my husband used to beat me, the elderly woman in the house across the street would intervene and make him stop” (31 March 2013). In Maya’s case, her neighbour intervened as Maya’s *sās* was no longer alive. In situations of violence such as this, women (RBs) called on their natal kin for support (see 7.4). Neighbours did not usually intervene in this way, but informants did cite instances when their kin had been informed of their situation by other women in their marital villages. For CRBs whose kin were far away, this option was not available to them. Some studies on CRM argue that CRBs felt that solidarity with “local women” did not exist as CRBs were considered “inferior” to the latter (Kukreja and Kumar 2013). This was not true for CRBs in Barampur, however. Just as for RBs, other factors (as I discuss below) influenced CRBs’ ability to establish relationships with other women.

Women (CRBs and RBs alike) were able to establish relationships with women of other households, but only at a later stage in their married lives as their mobility increased. As young brides, they remained confined to their households. At this stage of their married lives, if they failed to establish relationships with other in-married women of the household, women found themselves extremely vulnerable and without support.

Three RBs (in their mid-40s) said that as new brides, if they were seen talking to anyone, their *sās* would say, “*humārī bahū ko sikhā diyā*” [other women were teaching the daughter-in-law to be rebellious or teaching her tricks]. Of them, Kusum (RB, 47, Chamar) added: “You cannot dare to talk to other women. You have to be obedient when you are a new bride, but I am no longer afraid” (27 February 2013). Ensuring that a young bride did not establish relationships with other women was a way senior women maintained control and asserted their authority over younger ones. Writing on CRBs in Haryana and Rajasthan, Kukreja and Kumar maintain that although “local brides” were also secluded to varying degrees, the “shadowing of each and every move of the new bride” was restricted to CRBs alone (2013: 52). Similarly, in her work on Bangladeshi wives in eastern UP, Blanchet argues that “purchased wives” were “carefully watched” for fear that they might escape (2008: 161). In Barampur, however, of the 19 CRBs interviewed, only three said that their husbands/in-laws kept an eye on them when they first came, concerned that they might run away. What these three CRBs had in common was that all had been “deceived” and brought to Barampur by someone unknown to them and had no contact with their natal families. Informants cited instances of CRBs who “ran away” in the past or had attempted to do so.

While seniority offered women (CRBs and RBs alike) the possibility of accessing support from other women, some women felt that they could not rely on such support. Five informants remarked: “No one is a friend here” adding that a woman had friends in her *pīhar* [natal home] but not her *sasurāl* [marital home]. Radha (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) felt that women did not support each other, but criticised each other behind their backs. Ritu (RB, 25, Jat) explained that she did not share her problems with other women as she felt that they could not be trusted: they might talk about it with others and if her in-laws or husbands heard of it, it would result in a fight in the house. She added that her elder sister was also married in Barampur yet she saw her infrequently because her *sās* was unhappy every time her sister paid her a visit. Ritu said she could also not visit her sister without her in-laws’ permission.

Writing on long-distance inter-provincial marriages in China, Davin argued that a migrant bride could counter her isolation in her husband’s home by recruiting other

women from her kinship circle and natal home (2008: 69, 75). Similarly, Schein, also writing on China, noted that the only way that brides achieved a sense of belonging in the communities they married into was among those who also came from “home” (2005: 64). In their study of CRBs in Haryana and Rajasthan, Kukreja and Kumar found that brides brought other brides from their native states because they felt having more brides from their native states allowed them to “reminisce about back home” (2013: 27).

In Barampur, I questioned CRBs about their relationships with other CRBs, particularly with those from their native states. With the exception of one CRB, others said that they knew other CRBs, especially those married within their husbands’ castes. They added that they did not have friendships with these women, but only a sense of belonging to the same place. Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) told me:

If I was the only one here, I would say, look where is my native home and where have I come. Now there are so many here – she is also from my village, as is she. When I am with Mamta [CRB from Silchar like Kalawati, married to her HyB] I do not say that she is my *devrānī* [HyBW]. I say that she is my sister because she is from my native village. But if you ask me, does Mamta support you? I will say no.

(11 February 2013)

Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) talked about her relationship with two other CRBs.

We are all from Bengal. Whenever I want something from the market, I ask Parvati to get it for me. My *sās* is away, so I asked Parvati to bring me eggs. Whenever I fall ill, she sends her daughter to wash utensils, sweep and help with the work. Chhaya also buys things for me sometimes. I got to know her because she used to come to sell earthenware. The first time she came, she could tell I am not from here [UP]. She asked me: Where are you from? I told her even I am *wahā kī* [from there – Bengal].

(5 December 2012)

Varsha said that she was helped by Parvati and Chhaya, but that she did not share secrets or talk about her problems with them. She said she was afraid, as did RBs, that they might talk about it with other women and it might get reported back to her *sās* and husband. Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) and Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) were related because their mothers were sisters. Hemlata had acted as the

go-between for Kalawati's marriage. When they both talked to me individually, they expressed a lot of sympathy for each other's problems, but they saw each other only occasionally. Hemlata told me that she did not go to Kalawati's house because Kalawati's husband disapproved. "He would think we are conspiring about something together" (1 February 2013). Kalawati told me that if she talked to Hemlata, her *devrānī* [HyBW] or *jethānī* [HeBW] complained to her husband and created a fight between them. CRBs, then, were unable to establish supportive relationships with other CRBs for reasons similar to those that made it difficult for RBs to establish relationships with other women.

Conclusion

For all women in rural north India, marriage entails movement to a new village and adjustment in a new household. For CRBs, marriage additionally meant migration over a very long distance. RBs and CRBs, across castes, shared the sadness they felt at leaving their parents and natal homes and contrasted the relative freedom of the *pīhar* to the *sasurāl*. The movement from *pīhar* to *sasurāl*, however, was more difficult for CRBs than for RBs. Marriage entailed some adjustment for RBs, but, CRBs had to go through a resocialisation process that involved adopting the way of life (e.g. diet and clothing) of a culturally and linguistically different region and acquiring new work-related skills (e.g. learning to make cowdung cakes). For some CRBs, the process also entailed a name change. Also, on account of geographic distance, unlike RBs, they did not have access to natal kin support in the early years of marriage to ease the adjustment process. This process of adjustment was more difficult for some CRBs than for others. Learning the language, for instance, was more difficult for some depending on the state where they originated (Hindi speaking or non-Hindi speaking). The process of adapting to new food habits varied according to the castes of their husbands. For CRBs who were Muslim before they were married in Barampur to Hindu men, adjustment also entailed letting go of all markers of their pre-marital religious identity.

While there were differences between CRBs and RBs with respect to adjustment in the *sasurāl*, exploration of other aspects of women's everyday lives, such as the work that women do, shows that their post-marital experiences were shaped largely by

factors other than their regional identities. As far as work was concerned, women were largely responsible for *ghar kā kām* [housework] – cooking, cleaning, washing utensils and clothes, making cowdung cakes and childcare, with men helping only with milking the cattle or cutting fodder. The composition of the households had a significant bearing on women's work as it was shared between women of the household. In joint households, housework was shared even though how it was shared related both to the passage of time and seniority. Women usually had less work as they grew older, as they were helped by daughters or daughters-in-law. Due to *pardā* restrictions, young or new brides did not take care of *bāhar kā kām* [outside work] that included going to the fields to fetch fodder for the cattle, wood for cooking, buying provisions from the shops or drawing water from the public tap. It was usually senior women (the *sās*) or men (the husband, father-in-law or husband's male relatives) who were responsible for these tasks. Women's outside paid employment was determined by factors such as caste and also age as women's mobility increased as they grew older. Compulsions of poverty and widowhood largely influenced decisions regarding women's waged work.

Like the work that they did, the relationships that women established with other women (both within and in other households) in their *sasurāl* were determined not by whether they were RBs or CRBs but factors such as mobility (that increased as women advanced in their married lives) and household structure. Women did not often develop harmonious relationships with senior women of their households. As they advanced in their married lives, however, the possibilities of accessing support beyond the household increased and some established supportive relationships with women in other households of their own or different castes. Some other women, however, felt that there was no one they could trust and call their own in their marital villages. I argue that for all women (RBs and CRBs alike) age/seniority was more significant in determining the power and agency that they had in their day-to-day lives, rather than where they came from.

CHAPTER SIX: THE CONJUGAL RELATIONSHIP

To study gendered relationships it is necessary to attend both to the socially, politically and economically structured inequalities within which couples negotiate and to the possibilities for tenderness, pleasure, and cooperation that exist in spite of these inequalities.

(Wardlow and Hirsch 2006: 3)

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on women's (RBs' and CRBs') relationships with their husbands. I look at how marital relations are lived and experienced and the nature of intimacy in this north Indian context where marriages remain parentally arranged, the choice of those involved is considered irrelevant and spouses begin marriage as strangers to each other. Drawing on Jamieson's work, I use intimacy to refer to "the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality" (2011: 1.1) and practices of intimacy to refer to "practices which enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness..." (2011: 1.2).

The question of equality in intimate relationships has been the subject of academic discussions. In the preceding chapter, I focused on the unequal division of work between husbands and wives, with women being solely responsible for household work and childcare. In this chapter, I begin by highlighting the inequality of marital relationships by focusing on sexual relations, reproductive "choice" and marital violence. I outline the basic similarities in these aspects in the lives of CRBs and RBs. I then move on to discuss that as women separated from their natal kin may often find themselves without support from other women in their marital homes (see 5.3), they express in different ways a yearning for support from their husbands. I examine the importance of everyday practices of intimacy in women's lives to argue that tenderness, pleasure, and cooperation might exist, as Wardlow and Hirsch argue, despite the inequality. Drawing on a notion of personhood that attends not only to agential features but recognises suffering, vulnerability and endurance (Reader 2007, see Introduction), I demonstrate that women (CRBs and RBs alike) are not entirely without agency and can find ways to resist and endure, but may also feel supported and intimate with husbands over the course of their married lives.

6.1. Love, Intimacy and Marriage in India

A body of literature on marriage has focused on how parentally arranged marriage as opposed to “love” or self-arranged marriage remains the ideal and socially sanctioned form of marriage in India (Chakravarti 2005; Chowdhry 1997; Dhanda 2012; Mody 2008). An arranged marriage is based on the notion that love is not supposed to be the basis for establishing a relationship but that love develops following marriage (Khatidja 2014). A resolution between the two is believed to be achieved in an “arranged love marriage” or “love-cum-arranged” marriage “whereby a romantic choice already made is endorsed by parental approval” (Uberoi 2006: 180; see also Grover 2009; Mody 2008). In the context of this discussion, Khandelwal (2009) argues that the distinction between arranged marriage and its associations with South Asia/India/East, tradition, authority of kin, lack of autonomy, emotional and sexual fulfillment as opposed to love marriage and its link with the West, modernity, individual choice, emotional and sexual fulfilment has been overstated.

A growing body of literature on middle-class Indians draws attention to a desire for companionate marriage among young men and women (Donner 2002; Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; WS Jadavpur University 2009) with greater stress on affective bonds and intimacy in contrast to previous generations in creating marital ties (Parry 2001; Twamley 2013), as noted in different cultural contexts (see Hirsch and Wardlow 2006). More recent literature on matrimonial websites, as new modes of marriage arrangement, points out that although parental approval remains mandatory, greater agency is available to young men and women in seeking mates more suited to their needs than to the needs of their families (Sharangpani 2010). The stress is on “individual compatibility” more than “social conformity” (Kaur and Dhanda 2014: 273) blurring the boundaries between love and arranged marriage (Khatidja 2014). Much of this literature has focused on young men and women and how they negotiate to bring love in, in the arrangement of marriage.

Some recent literature has shifted its focus from marriage and heterosexual desire to alternative living practices and relationships focusing on love, romance and singlehood – “the unmarried, unmarried woman” (Pappu 2011), same sex relationships (Biswas 2011; Manayath 2015) and non-marital cohabitation (Agrawal

2012). In the Indian context, where marriage remains near universal, the question of love and intimacy within marriage has not received sufficient academic attention. Some work explores love within the familial context and between a married couple (e.g. Trawick 1990 writing on a Tamil family) or on women in marital relationships. Kakar's work, for instance, focuses on the accounts of two slum women in Delhi and describes married women's yearning for the *jōdī* [pair] with the "notion of the indissolubility of the couple" being a cherished ideal (1989: 84). Raheja and Gold's work in rural north India describes how married women express a desire for sex and conjugal intimacy through songs in a context where family life is centred around the patrilineal extended household and a man's ties to his own kin are expected to be prioritised over the conjugal bond (Raheja and Gold 1994).

Grover examines the lived experience of marriage and co-habitation in a low-income neighbourhood in Delhi. Central to her work is an exploration of what form of marriage (arranged or love or arranged-love) or co-habitation is most egalitarian for women. Likewise, some other studies have addressed the question of equality in marital relationships in India and conclude that they remain asymmetrical (see Busby 2000; Twamley 2012), as also noted by studies on western contexts that show that "much of personal life remains structured by inequalities" (Jamieson 1998, 1999: 477; see also Twamley and Faircloth 2015). In this chapter, I explore the "everydayness" (Gabb and Fink 2015: 971) of RBs' and CRBs' relationships with their husbands. By doing so, I add to the scant literature on married women's (particularly rural Indian women's) intimate lives and thereby contribute to an understanding of intimacy in arranged marriages.

6.2. Sexual Relations

For women in Barampur, marriage at a young age, lack of knowledge about sexual matters and the fact that their husbands were strangers to them meant that when they first moved to live in the *sasurāl*, sexual relations were marked by the absence of choice and experienced as difficult. Informants like Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) laughed about her ignorance on sexual matters:

When I came here at *gaunā* [cohabitation], I was 16. I did not know that you get a husband in marriage [laughed]... I did not know that you have to sleep with your husband. I thought that as I did work in my *pīhar* [natal home], I would do work in my *sasurāl*. At the time, I did not understand anything. There was no exposure to television. Mothers would not talk about such things. My elder sister was married, but she felt *sharm* [shame] in talking about such things.

(18 September 2012)

Likewise, Kripa (RB, 75, Jat) commented: “The first time my husband came to me, I thought, why is he teasing me? I told him that if he tries to do anything to me, I will tell my father” (19 May 2013). Women like Kripa and Sarla explained that it was only after they moved to cohabit with their husbands that they learnt about “*ādmī ke sāth sambandh*” [the sexual relations that a woman has with her husband]. It was a *jethānī* [HeBW] or husband who explained this to them. Some informants (CRB and RB alike), however, had been told about “what would happen” by a married friend/s from their *pīhar* or a female relative: *buā* [FZ], *bhābī* [BW] or *chāchī* [FyBW]. Like Sarla, other informants said that a mother never talked to a daughter on such matters because of *sharm*.

Nine of the 38 informants interviewed talked about the sense of fear they felt as their husband was a stranger and yet the marriage was consummated on the first night. Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar) commented: “He is a stranger and then he takes you and sleeps with you at night. I had not even seen his face until after the wedding” (28 February 2013). Abha (RB, 25, Chamar) told me: “I think that when women get married they are most afraid of this [sex]. They are afraid because other women tell them that this will happen” (29 January 2013). Others like Ritu (RB, 25, Jat) said that she was “*ghabrāyī huyī aur darī hūyī*” [anxious and scared] because of the physical pain she would experience. “I was told that it would hurt but I did not know how much it would hurt. In the village, you hesitate asking other women” (29 May 2013).

Some, like Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar), recounted her experience of submitting to coerced sex.

The man does not think, she is still young... no one leaves you...*ādmī toh chortā nahī* [your husband does not leave you alone]. He [husband] was

thādā [used to describe a tall and well-built man] and I was like a child...He must have thought, what can she do?

(2 February 2013)

Likewise, Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) talked about pleading with her husband to let her be as she was menstruating on the first night and did not feel well. She added: “He said he cannot wait. The next morning, I was not even in a condition to get up from the *khāt* [cot]” (8 May 2013). Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) talked about being very young and had not attained puberty when she had sexual relations with her husband:

I must have been 12-13 when I first came here. When I had come here and I was living in his house I had to stay here and stay with him [husband]. What could I do? Even my *sās* [mother-in-law] did not think about this. *Bahut dar lagā thā* [I felt extremely afraid]. No one told me this will happen. *Jab aise aise kām hone lage* [when these things started happening], I went to Hemlata [CRB and the go-between for her marriage] and told her. Hemlata said, ‘this will happen now that you are married’. A few days later I started menstruating. *Bahut zyadā taklīf huyī thi* [it was very difficult].

(11 March 2013)

Even until two decades ago when women were married at younger ages, they were kept at the *pīhar* and not sent to live at the *sasurāl* [marital home] until after they had attained puberty. A RB would thus not share Kalawati’s experience of having to consummate the marriage prior to puberty. The *sās* usually ensured that sexual relations did not take place until the bride returned for cohabitation. Though married post-puberty, most RB informants were married below the age of 18 (the legal age at marriage) and they talked about how the experience of sexual relations in the initial months was characterised by *taklīf/pareshānī* [difficulty]. Abha (RB, 25, Chamar) told me that because she was 14 at the time she had to seek medical help because of the physical pain she experienced for the first three months of being married: “*Ādat nahī hotī*” [you are not used to it], she said (29 January 2013). Similarly, Shanti (RB, 24, Kumhar) who was married at a young age said: “*Sharīr par bahut zōr partā hai*” [the husband’s physical force on the body is very great] (1 April 2013). Khalida (RB, 45, Teli) talked about how the *pareshānī* she experienced was eased by the visits she made to her natal home in the early years of marriage, something a CRB could not do (see 7.2).

I attempted to understand whether women came to think of and experience sexual relations differently in the course of their married lives. Women's accounts of their sexual lives ranged from those of force or coercion, lack of interest, compulsion, duty and submission to those of desire and pleasure. Not all (38) informants talked to me about their sexual lives (see 1.4). Of those (22) who did, only four said that sexual relations were pleasurable.

Ritu (RB, 25, Jat) told me: "Sometimes the husband desires sex and sometimes the wife. It is not as though women have no desire. Women probably lose interest once their children grow up but women like me, of my age, have no problem. *Shādī kā matlab yahī hai*" [the meaning of marriage is this, i.e., a sexual relationship] (29 May 2013). Likewise, Muneera (RB, 32, Lohar) was of the opinion that she had sexual relations with her husband because she wanted to and not because she had to. She felt that sex helped both the man and woman to put all their tensions and tiredness aside and if there was no sexual relationship there would be problems in a marriage. Both Ritu and Muneera were similar in that both were graduates. They both had talked to me about how they had a say in the choice of spouse when their marriages were arranged. Both had talked to their husbands for several months via a mobile phone during the period between the formalisation of the marriage and the wedding (see 2.2). Muneera and Rajni had, however, experienced the same anxiety and fear as other informants when they first had sexual relations with their husbands. Only over time did they come to experience sexual relations as pleasurable.

Urmila (RB, 32, Jat) saw the sexual relationship as fortifying the marital relationship. Her husband had been in a relationship with another woman for a large part of their married life. She said: "I wanted to have *sambandh* [sexual relations] with him so that he would come back to me" (29 May 2013).

Most informants (RB and CRB alike), though, suggested that they neither felt desire nor did sex bring them pleasure. In Barampur, I often heard women refer to sex as *ādmī kā kām* [man's work]. Some like Kripa (RB, 75, Jat) said: "*nafrat thī*" [I felt revulsion] (19 May 2013). Shanti (RB, 24, Kumhar) explained: "*Karnā partā hai* [you have to do it] or else the man will say, you have not come here as my sister,

why did you get married?” (1 April 2013). Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli) talked about being beaten for refusing sex:

Ab zyadā nafrat hotī hai iss kām se [now I feel more repulsed than before]...He used to beat me because I did not go to him. He was very short tempered. I used to be afraid of him. Women have relations with their husband because they have to. You cannot say no to your husband no matter what... if you refuse, they say, ‘what did you come to do here then? What will I do with you? Run away from here and go back to your *pīhar*’. You cannot tell your natal family this... You have to agree.

(4 April 2013)

Likewise, Pushpa (CRB, late 30s, Jat) said: “I never feel like having sex and I refuse when I am troubled with him [husband]. I have been beaten several times for refusing. After being beaten, I have to agree” (30 July 2013). Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) talked about being made to engage in sexual activity that she found troubling. One morning she told me about how her husband had made her watch animal pornography on his mobile phone the previous night. She was disturbed and asked me if that was a *māmulī bāt* [common] and something that husbands did. Similarly, Anita (mid-40s, Jat, F) told me about how her husband only had sex with her “*galat tarāh se*” [the wrong way], referring to anal sex. She talked about how she experienced pain and *taklīf* [difficulty]. She added that this was the reason why she never conceived a second child as “that was the only way he did it” (2 April 2013). The discussion so far resonates with western feminist critiques of heterosexual patriarchal marriage. Pateman (1988) sees heterosexual patriarchal marriage as an inherently unequal contract that secures a husband’s right to the wife’s body and sexuality. She asserts: the marriage contract alone “can turn use of sexual property....into the use of a person”. It is not the wife, but the “husband who has use of a person” (1988: 172).¹³

Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) recognised the sexual relationship as central to the marital relationship yet it was not what she desired and she saw sex as a *majbūrī* [compulsion].

¹³ Indian feminist legal scholars point out that the consent of the wife to sexual relations is largely insignificant under all marriage laws. The rape law in India explicitly excludes non-consensual and forced sex within marriage from the definition of rape under the penal code (Baxi 2000; PLD 2010).

This work is for people who are physically strong. I do not get enough to eat. It is not for people like me. What is the point in doing this *kām* [work]? Nothing happens to the man, but the woman suffers. No woman likes it...but if you do not do it, other women will say, she did not have children.

(8 May 2013)

Similarly, Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) saw sex as serving only the purpose of procreation. She remarked: “I do not understand why this does not end once children are born” (18 September 2012). In some informants’ understanding, consenting to sexual relations was tied to a sense of duty as wives. Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat), for instance, talked about her husband, a truck driver who migrated out for work. She said that she had never been forced and “stayed with him” because he was her husband and returned after several days. Similarly, Khalida (RB, 45, Teli) told me: “My husband is a decent man; he is earning and feeding us. I have to stay with him. We had a *nikāh* [Muslim marriage ceremony]” (20 March 2013).

In the context of most women suggesting that sexual relations did not bring them pleasure, I wish to point out that some women’s responses may have been influenced by the fact that I was an unmarried woman (see 1.4) or by considerations of shame – the cultural expectation that a modest woman must not express sexual desire or feel pleasure. At the same time, reflecting on my conversations with informants, I realised that some women talked about their experiences of sexual relations following on conversations about other topics and not always in response to questions I asked about sex. Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli), for instance, responded to my question about why husbands beat their wives by saying: “The beating is usually because of one thing – refusing sex” (4 April 2013). I asked her why and she went on to explain that she felt uninterested. What also emerged was that factors such as lack of reproductive “choice” (see 6.3), violence (see 6.4) and work and livelihood concerns had a bearing on how sexual relations were experienced. Sakeena, for instance, told me: “I start my day at 5 a.m....work never ends. My husband says I never go to him...After a whole day of work, is this the only thing left to do?” (4 April 2013). Shanti (RB, 24, Kumhar) had other concerns. She had five children (all below the age of 10). She said she was “afraid of sex in case *bachā nā reh jāye*” [the child stays, i.e., of getting

pregnant] as her husband neither accepted responsibility for limiting the family size nor did he bring her contraception (see 6.3).

Some, like Sarla (RB, 47, Jat), explained their lack of desire as tied to the absence of support from their husbands (see 6.5). Sarla had spent more than half her married life at her *pīhar* because her husband was having a relationship with his *chāchī* [FyBW] and she was beaten most of the time she spent at her *sasurāl*. She did not have sexual relations with her husband for a large part of her married life. In our conversations, she always referred to sex as *būrā kām* [bad work] but on one occasion she told me:

I feel very bad that my husband does not stay with me but what could I say to you? Now at times he wants to stay here at night and asks me to have sex but I am no longer interested. I spent my youth alone... I feel that without a sexual relationship there is no marriage unless marriage means taking care of the housework and cooking. If my husband *ne sāth diyā hotā* [had supported me] even I would have been interested in having a sexual relationship with him. I feel that I had a married life only for one month. It was the only time when my husband had shown any consideration towards me.

(13 August 2013)

Unlike Sarla, Munesh (RB, 38, Kumhar) suggested that she came to experience sexual relations differently over the course of her married life as she developed a relationship with her husband – an intimacy that was based on understanding and support.

Initially, *būrā lagtā thā* [it felt bad]. I felt I came to someone else's home and I did this [sex]. I felt shame. I no longer feel this way. I started staying here and with him [husband]. Earlier when he would come to me, I would think, why has he come? *Pehlay marzī nahī thī, āb toh hai* [At first I did not want to, but now I do agree/consent]. Now it has been nineteen years, what problem will I have? My husband kept me well. *Sāth nibhāyā* [supported me]. He never raised a hand on me. If I am not feeling well he does not expect me to have sex. I tell him that I am not well or I do not feel like it. He never forced me.

(26 May 2013)

To summarise, fear, anxiety and difficulty were used by RBs and CRBs alike to describe their experience of sexual relations in the initial months of marriage. Whilst some informants came to experience sexual relations as desirable or pleasurable over the course of their married lives, others used the language of revulsion, lack of

interest, compulsion, submission or coercion when they spoke about sex with their husbands. Crucially for CRBs and RBs alike, their experiences of sex were primarily shaped by similar factors (such as emotional intimacy or the absence of it, the fear of repeated pregnancies, work and violence), rather than their regional origins.

6.3. Reproductive “Choice” and Infertility

When I questioned women on whether they had a say about the number of children and when they wanted to have them, I was told “*bas, ho gayay*” [children were just born]. Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli) explained: “*Aurat kī nahī chaltī iss mamlay mey, mardon kī chaltī hai*” [A woman’s wishes in this connection do not prevail, only the man’s] (10 May 2013). When discussing childbearing, women pointed to the lack of control they had over sexual relations. Maya (CRB, mid-40s, Chamar) had eight children. She told me that if she had not reached menopause, she would have given birth to another four to five children. She said: “Who wants to have eight children? *Jab mard hī nahī māntā*” [when the man does not agree] (23 March 2013). Khalida (RB, 45, Teli) had seven. She talked about how the *dāī* [midwife] had explained to her that if she did not have sexual relations with her husband during some days of the month, then she would not get pregnant. She told me: “My husband never agreed to this. I felt angry but what can you do? A woman is a woman and a man a man” (20 March 2013). Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) shared her experience:

When I had my first child [son], I was not even 16. I was a child myself. My husband had been told that because I was very young, I would have trouble giving birth and that I should be taken to the hospital for the delivery but he did not pay any attention. My son died after birth. If you lose your first child, you lose all hope...He would have been a young man now. After that I gave birth to three daughters and then a son. I wanted to have an operation [sterilisation] then but my husband did not agree. He said that he wanted another son. I lost two more children after that and then I had two daughters. Look at what has happened to my body. If you have a child every year, *sharīr toh bekār ho jātā hai* [your body becomes useless]...your husband never thinks about you.

(2 February 2013)

Her comment raises several issues – getting pregnant at a young age, having multiple pregnancies, giving birth at home, not having access to healthcare, losing children, repeated childbirth taking a toll on the body and using contraception only with the

consent of the husband. These issues constantly emerged in my conversations with other women as well. Four of the 38 informants interviewed talked about getting pregnant within the first year of marriage and thinking “*jaldī ho gayā*” [it was early]. Seven told me that they did not have any knowledge about contraception. Of them, five said they did not know about oral contraceptives until a much later stage in their marriage. They learnt about them when their mobility increased and they started sitting with other women. By then, they had had several children. Five other informants could not take oral contraceptives because their husbands did not want them to. For Chhaya (CRB, 55, Kumhar), it was a problem of access. She told me that she had asked her husband for the *golī* [birth control pill] but he never brought it for her.

Aarti (RB, 27, Chamar) had two children – both sons. She told me that she did not want more children, but would not have an “operation” (sterilisation) because her husband was of the opinion that it causes problems. “He does not use anything and I do not take the *golī* because he says it causes side-effects. *Merī marzī unse kabhī alag nahī hotī*” [My wishes are never different from his] (13 February 2013). Like Aarti, six informants talked about how they had several children because they were not allowed to get sterilised by husbands and/or their *sās*. They said that they had wanted to after they had three or four children. There were few like Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli) who said that not getting sterilised was her own decision and that if she wanted to, her husband would not have a problem with it.

Elderly informants, across castes, talked about younger married women being more aware about contraception. “They have fewer children now” was often repeated to me. Women of the three Hindu castes, in their 20s and early 30s, talked about wanting fewer children because of *mehangaī* [increasing expenses] and the desire to educate their children. They also talked about being more aware of contraception because of the radio and having access to oral contraception through *āshās* [government appointed health workers].

Limiting the family size to two to three children, due to poverty, was the reason given by Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) for having an abortion. She had two children – a son and daughter. She told me that she would not have more children. She talked about

not being able to take the contraceptive pill because of the side-effects, but her husband was unwilling to use a condom. She pointed out that her husband had absolved himself of his responsibility and limiting the family size either through contraception or termination was solely her responsibility. She also stressed that if she became pregnant she could not abort without her husband's consent. Ritu (RB, 25, Jat) had one child – a daughter. She talked about how her husband forced her to have an abortion the second time she became pregnant because it was a girl. She told me: “*Bahut būrā lagā thā* [I felt very bad], I did not want to do it, but he made me” (29 May 2013). Sarla (RB, 47, Jat), as mentioned in 6.2, had spent most of her married life in her *pīhar* [natal home]. She had one son. She had an abortion the second time she was pregnant. She told me:

I decided not to keep it because I knew that I would have to return to my *pīhar*. Who would raise my two children in the *pīhar*? I felt very bad at the time. I would have liked to have a second child...maybe a daughter. If my husband was with me, I would have kept the child.

(12 February 2013)

Some Muslim informants, like Faiza (CRB, late 40s, Lohar) believed that their religion did not permit them to use contraception. Faiza had eight children. She told me that if she had not reached menopause, she would still be having children. Khalida (RB, 45, Teli), however, distinguished between *jāyez* [legitimate] and *nājāyez* [illegitimate]. Contraception, she said, falls in the former and abortion in the latter. She added that even among Muslims, young couples were having fewer children and using contraception to limit family size (see also Jeffery et al. 2008). Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli) had six children – five daughters and one son. She told me: “According to our religion [Islam] if you abort a child, *toh namāz kabool nahī hotā* [your prayers are not accepted]. This is written in the Quran [the holy book]” (30 March 2013). Yet she talked about having an abortion in 2001, three years before the birth of her youngest child, because it was a girl child. She added: “What would I do with so many girls? My husband is a *garīb mazdūr*” [poor casual labourer] (30 March 2013). She said that when she was pregnant with her youngest child (also a daughter) she thought of aborting again, but could not because the doctors told her that it would be life threatening for her.

Ten informants had multiple pregnancies and lost children because of the pressure to produce one or two sons. When talking about the experience of giving birth informants said, “*bahut dūkh hotā hai*” [*dūkh* literally translates as sadness but here they used *dūkh* to express the physical pain experienced during childbirth]. Six informants talked about being poor and not getting enough to eat post-childbirth and that adversely affecting their health and bodies, particularly as they grew older. Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) talked about the difficulties she experienced in giving birth to eight children but that “she could not say anything to her husband” (18 November 2012). For her, the birth of children brought with it a feeling of sadness:

When I had my first child, I was happy. Every woman wants to become a mother. I was happy when the second was born as well but not when I gave birth to the third, then the fourth and fifth.... *Jab kamzor hālāt mein bachā ho, toh dūkh hotā hai* [when a child is born in financially strained circumstances, you feel sad]. We do not even have enough to eat.

(30 January 2013)

Women talked about feeling pressured to conceive soon after the wedding. They explained that if a woman did not have a child within the first two years of marriage those around her (other women/in-laws) would start saying that she would never have children, “*kamī hai*” [there is a lack – suggesting that she was reproductively challenged] and that her husband should leave her and remarry. Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) told me: “If you do not have children, people will say, *yeh toh bānjh hai*” [she is barren] (2 February 2013). It was always assumed that it was the woman and not the man who was infertile.

Kanchan (CRB, 21, Chamar) was married in June 2012 (three months before I started fieldwork). During my initial visits, Kanchan told me that she was having trouble conceiving a child because of *sūjan* [inflammation] in her uterus and her husband told her that he would keep her only if she did. She underwent treatment and in September 2013, she gave birth to a boy child. Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) was also married in June 2012. Her story followed a different trajectory. In early October 2012, she talked about having had a miscarriage. In mid-December 2012, she told me about getting pregnant a second time and then having an abortion. A few months later she told me:

I have been married for almost a year now. Women in the neighbourhood tell me that those who got married at the same time as me have already had a child. I do not know what the problem is. The child never stays. My *nanad* [HZ] tells me, ‘you are a *hijrā* [eunuch], you cannot even have children’. When they are not willing to spend money on my treatment, then how will I have children? I went to the doctor and she told me that my uterus is weak. I do not get enough to eat. I had to have an abortion because I started bleeding and they [in-laws] told me that they do not have the money to take me to the doctor. I could have died. Then I called my *māmā* [MB] and asked him to take me from here. I had the abortion in my *pīhar*.

(8 May 2013)

Like Koyal, Pushpa (CRB, late 40s, Jat) was taunted for being childless but unlike Koyal she had been married for several years and had not given up hope. She told me:

For the last 18 years, I have been hoping to conceive a child. I got treated in the first few years of marriage yet I could not conceive. My husband says that there is no *kamī* [shortcoming] in him. Those in the *kunbā* [extended family] and neighbourhood call me *bānjh* [barren]. I feel very bad. I had to discontinue my treatment because we are very poor. My husband also tells me sometimes, ‘you cannot have children, run away from here’.

(30 July 2013)

Pushpa told me that she did not have the support of her husband who also blamed her for their childlessness. Unlike Koyal, who had relied on the help of her natal kin in the absence of care from those in her *sasurāl*, Pushpa could not seek such help (see Chapter Seven). In their work in Bijnor district in the 1980s, Jeffery et al. (1989) found that several women used their visits to their *pīhar* to obtain contraception or have abortions performed with their mother’s help. A visit to the *pīhar* provided women the possibility for independent action when husbands disagreed with them about family planning. Urmila (RB, 32, Jat) talked about being pregnant with twins after she had three children. She had an abortion and then an “operation”. She told me that she did not have the support of her husband or her mother but did so with the support of her *bhābhī* [BW].

Some like Nasira (RB, 26, Lohar) were struggling to have another child after they had their first child. Nasira had been married for nine years. She had an eight year old daughter. She got pregnant for the second time three years after the birth of her

daughter. She lost her second child and four children after that. She told me that she had been consulting a *hakim* [practitioner of *unānī* medicine associated with Muslims even though they often prescribe allopathic medicine] and failed to understand why the infants did not survive. When I first met her in April 2013 she had given birth to a stillborn baby eight days before. She had been advised by doctors not to conceive for the next six months. She told me that neither her husband nor she was using contraception. She added that losing children had been very difficult for her to cope with yet she had to conceive again because it was necessary for her to have a son because that is what both she and her husband wanted.

Ritu (NB, 25, Jat), like Nasira, had one daughter. She had an abortion the second time she was pregnant because it was a girl. During my fieldwork, she was pregnant for the third time and she said that she was carrying a male child. In the fifth month of her pregnancy, she had a miscarriage. I saw her a week later and she talked to me about how pregnancy was very hard for her and that she felt extremely ill during it. Despite the difficulties she had faced, however, it was essential for her to have another (male) child. It became clear that it was not only essential for a woman to have a child but a boy child, as the necessity of a son was strongly felt across castes (see Introduction and 3.1). Women felt insecure about not being able to produce a son and the possibility of their husbands leaving them and remarrying.

In sum, for RBs and CRBs alike, childbearing was influenced by their own lack of control over sexual relations, knowledge of and access to contraception and (infertility) treatment and the husband's capacity to determine on matters of contraception, termination of pregnancy and sterilisation. The pressure to produce a child in the early years of marriage and the necessity to produce a male child were also vital in shaping reproductive decisions.

6.4. Marital Violence

I knew that men beat their wives because I had seen my father beat my mother.

(Kajri, RB, 35, Jat, 30 January 2013)

In our *mohallā* [neighbourhood], getting beaten is like a *paramparā* [tradition]. This is not the case only in our household.

(Shanti, RB, 24, Kumhar, 1 April 2013)

A man can beat his wife but a woman cannot raise her hand to her husband. If she does, even her natal family will not support her.

(Kusum, RB, 47, Chamar, 27 February 2013)

The quotes above indicate the extent to which violence within the domestic sphere is normalised, across castes, in women's everyday lives. Other studies have also drawn attention to the widespread acceptance of wife-beating in rural north India. In Bijnor district, Jeffery and Jeffery were told: 'No one here escapes a beating', and they comment that "Wife-beating was regarded by men as a necessary and legitimate means of controlling their wives" (1996: 127). In rural Haryana, men justified inflicting violence on wives as a way "to keep the women in line" (Chowdhry 2012: 45). In her comparative study of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, Jejeebhoy found that wife-beating was justified as a "woman's due and her husband's right" (1998: 855). In this section, I use marital violence to describe the violence inflicted by men on wives.¹⁴ I have discussed instances of forced sex in 6.2 that also constitute marital violence. The discussion on marital violence in this section will focus on *pītnā* [wife-beating] and will include *gālī dēnā* [verbal abuse] but also, drawing on Dobash and Dobash's understanding, various forms of controlling behaviours (1998: 155).

Some recent literature on CRBs in Haryana has focused specifically on the violence that CRBs suffer in their marital homes (Ahlawat forthcoming). CRBs in Barampur, like RBs, shared their experiences of suffering violence. Seven CRBs pointed out that while some men beat their wives even in their native states, it was "not like here [UP]", pointing to how wife-beating was accepted as a normal activity in this region. I attempted to understand whether there was a difference in the nature of violence

¹⁴ I make this clarification in light of Dobash and Dobash's observation (though in a different context) that the terms "marital violence" or "spousal assault" are gender neutral or equalitarian. These terms suggest that each partner in a marriage is equally likely to "play the part of perpetrator or victim in a violent episode, that the frequency and severity of the physical force used by each is similar; and that the social meaning and consequences of these acts are the same". This is not the case since in instances of marital violence, it is the husband who is most likely to be the perpetrator and his wife the victim (1979: 11-12). More recent studies in the British context also show that women constitute the overwhelming majority of those subjected to domestic violence (Walby and Allen 2004).

that RBs and CRBs experienced and if the latter suffered more violence. What emerged was diversity in women's experiences of marital violence. Not all RBs suffered violence just as not all CRBs did. The CR and regional status of women was not a determining factor. Rather, informants in Barampur offered a range of explanations for why women were beaten by husbands.

For CRBs and RBs alike, their experience of violence was shaped by similar disputes related to alcoholism, bad temper, suspicions of infidelity and tensions about work and poverty. The literature on western contexts also outlines men's possessiveness and jealousy; disagreements and expectations related to domestic work; men's sense of their right to punish their partners for perceived wrongdoing, and the importance to men of maintaining or exercising their power and authority as significant in understanding the violence against wives. The role of alcoholism in exacerbating other problems and being a source of conflict has also been noted (Dobash and Dobash 1979; 1998:144, 149).

Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli) told me: "A woman always bears the brunt of the man's anger" (10 May 2013). Women talked about being beaten and verbally abused if they did not meet their husbands' demands on time, for instance, not serving food on time, not heating water for bathing, if clothes were lying around and so on. Answering back to the husband or speaking up to the *sās* or *nanad* [HZ] was offered as another reason. This echoes the findings of other studies on domestic violence in India based on national surveys (see Agnes and D'Mello 2015: 78). As discussed above (6.2), women were also beaten if they refused sex. Seven informants had internalised the idea of beatings as a response *galtī* [wrongdoing] on their part. Some like Kamlesh (RB, 27, Kumhar), however, were critical of the power relationships that legitimised this violence. "A woman is beaten not because it is her fault, but men beat their wives because they want to and can" (17 May 2013). Similarly, Abha told me: "It makes me angry that a woman cannot do anything against a man's will, all she can do is fight. But I never fought with my husband as I was afraid of being beaten" (19 December 2012).

In her work on domestic abuse among Pakistani women in Scotland, Mirza (2015) highlights the "specificity of South Asian women's experiences of family abuse"

(2015: 2). She argues that the western literature focuses on a nuclear family while South Asian women live their lives in patriarchal extended households. She distinguishes between family abuse and spousal abuse and highlights the role of female affinal kin (the mother-in-law in particular) in instigating (and even perpetrating) violence (2015: 14). In Barampur, eight informants talked about being beaten when their husbands were provoked by other women – *sās* [HM], *jethānī* [HeBW] or *nanad* [HZ]. Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) insisted that the problem was not her husband but her *sās*. She said that her husband was *bahut achā* [very nice] when I asked her: “but he beats you” she replied: “He does not beat me when I do something wrong, no matter how big the mistake but only when she [HM] makes him. His mother taunts him [husband] and says, are you not a man? Do you not know how to beat your wife?” (8 May 2013).

Koyal added that her *sās* and *sūsar* [HF] were constantly verbally abusing her and that on one occasion her *sūsar* chased her with a *dāntī* [sickle]. She said that even her *nanad* [HZ] raised her hand to her. On more than one occasion, I was told by others in her neighbourhood how Koyal had returned to her *pīhar* because she was beaten by her in-laws. She insisted that if she was living *alag* [separate/in a nuclear household] her husband would not beat her and there would be no problem between them. Kanchan (CRB, 21, Chamar), like Koyal, was married in June 2012. She was beaten by her husband when he was provoked by her *jethānī* [HeBW]. Like Koyal, during the early months, she talked to me about how her situation would change once they became *alag*. Six months after her wedding, they did set up a nuclear household but nothing much had changed for Kanchan as her *jethānī*, who now lived in the adjoining household, continued to incite Kanchan’s husband to beat her. Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat), like Koyal, shared with me the experience of being beaten even by her husband’s male kin – her *devars* [HyB]. Thus, in addition to the role of female affinal kin my findings suggest that male affinal kin were also involved in both instigating and perpetrating violence and setting up a nuclear household did not necessarily help women evade violence.

As far as the nature of violence was concerned, ten informants (CRBs and RBs alike) said that they had never been beaten by their husbands. Three others (two RBs and a

CRB) said that they had never been beaten, but their husbands had slapped them a few times. This they considered irrelevant when I asked questions about wife-beating. Abha (RB, 25, Chamar), for instance, commented: “My husband never beat me...you know, like other women here get beaten... *dande se* [with a stick]. He only used a couple of slaps here and there whenever he was angry” (19 December 2012). Some others shared with me their experiences of being beaten *būrī tarah se* [excessively/brutally]. Sheela (CRB, early-40s, Chamar) told me:

There is not a bone in my body that has not been hurt. He has done very bad things to me. He broke my arm five times. [I asked her, you mean the bone?]. He did all of this [she showed me injury marks]. Last month, one night he was drinking and he hit me on the head with a wooden stick. I collapsed and had to get eight stitches.

(2 February 2013)

Anita (RB, mid-40s, Jat) described her experience: “Once he threw a wooden ladder on me. Another time he beat me with an iron rod and broke my arm and on the same day he made me bathe the buffalo with the broken arm” (19 November 2012). Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) talked about being beaten by her husband when she was pregnant with her second child. “He kept kicking me hard on my stomach”, she said (12 December 2012). Similarly, Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) talked about being kicked and beaten when she was pregnant with her son because her husband did not want the child. “He repeatedly said: *isko toh nikālongā*” [I will remove/get rid of the foetus] (18 December 2012). Hemlata (CRB, late-50s, Kumhar), a widow, said:

My husband would beat me with whatever he could find. My body would turn blue with the bruises. I passed my days with a lot of difficulty. When you become old you suffer because you have been beaten in the past. My husband stopped beating me when he fell ill and could not do anything on his own. In all those years, he did not do anything for me but at least the beating stopped.

(2 February 2013)

Similarly, Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) also a widow, talked about being beaten every day while her husband was alive. “Even now my arms and legs hurt when I wake up in the morning because I was beaten so much by him. I have not been happy since I got married...” (30 January 2013). I recall a conversation I had with Sarla (RB, 47, Jat)

about what she told her *devrānī* [HyBW] when her *devar* [HyB] died. “I told her, why are you crying? Now at least the beating will stop” (3 February 2013).

Harwin and Brown point out that violence within the domestic domain is not a “one-off event or incident but part of an ongoing pattern of controlling behaviour” (2000: 206). Ten informants talked about being beaten from the first year of marriage. Of them, six (both RBs and CRBs), married for over 15 years, said that the beating had stopped a few years ago. This they attributed to children growing older, having an adult son, a change in the marital relationship although two could not provide an explanation. There were others like Sheela (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) for whom the beating continued:

He drinks and *būrī būrī gālī detā hai* [he verbally abuses me] and beats me even now but I am no longer afraid. I am not afraid because I think for how long can he beat me? Now I speak up to him. He accuses me of staying with other men, even more now than before. If I wear a bangle or *bindī* [worn on the forehead by Hindu women], he asks me why I am wearing it. He asks me why I change my clothes every day.

(21 September 2012)

Likewise, Devanti’s (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) case highlights suspicion as a cause of conflict with her husband. When I first met her in September 2012, she was a widow with two married daughters and she lived with her three sons (below 14 years of age). She talked to me about her difficult marriage to her deceased husband, a much older man who was an alcoholic and violent towards her. A month later she told me about her relationship with another Chamar (Suresh) from Barampur whom she met in 2009 while working at the brick-kiln. She talked about wanting to marry him but feared that this would be unacceptable to her natal family in Jharkhand with whom she had maintained contact since she first came to Barampur. She shared her ideas of the life she would have with Suresh, often mentioning how much *pyār* [love] there was between them. Her deceased husband’s relatives, aware of her relationship with Suresh, had threatened her with consequences. A month later (October 2012), Devanti eloped and had a “court marriage” [registered/legal marriage] with Suresh. They stayed away from Barampur for a few months. I met her ten months later in her home that she then shared with Suresh. She told me:

He is a different man now. He does not let me go anywhere or talk to anyone, not even with other women. He keeps an eye on me. He is always fighting with me saying, 'why were you standing there? Why were you looking at him?' He is suspicious. He thinks I will run away with another man. He beats me excessively.

(17 August 2013)

Women in Devanti's neighbourhood also told me about how much Suresh beat her and that they neither went to her house nor talked with her. She had left her children behind and had not communicated with her natal kin post-elopement. The freedom that Devanti had attained as an older woman with married daughters and being the head of her household, she lost with her marriage to Suresh and she found herself extremely isolated and controlled. This resonates with Grover's findings in her study of low-caste women in a working class neighbourhood in Delhi. Grover discusses what she describes as consensual secondary unions and argues that the ability to exercise choice in entering or terminating relationships does not necessarily make relationships more egalitarian. She points to the continuities between primary and secondary marriages and shows that secondary marriages reproduce the violence and gender inequality of the primary marriage (2011: 209).

All informants, apart from those like Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli) were of the opinion that it was wrong for a man to beat his wife. Sakeena remarked: "So what if a man beats his wife? It is *jāyez* [legitimate]. I think *merā ādmī hai, mār le* [he is my husband, let him beat me]. A woman should not leave if her husband beats her. Fights take place in every household" (4 April 2013). Similarly, Nasira (RB, 26, Lohar) said: "Even if a man beats his wife their marriage is *thek thāk* [okay] because it happens in anger. Yet they stay together" (14 July 2013). Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) shared how the first time she was beaten, she felt the beating would stop soon but it did not until her husband died. Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) had internalised the idea that it was acceptable to be beaten for wrongdoing yet she was critical:

I cannot understand...if someone does something wrong she is beaten but when I do not do anything wrong, why should I get beaten? They [in-laws] say I talk back to them. You tell me if someone does an injustice to you would you not speak up? Will you remain silent?

(8 May 2013)

Others like Abha (RB, 25, Chamar) expressed her defiance through silence. “The first time he hit me, I felt very bad. Even my father had never raised a hand on me. I would not talk to him for the next five days whenever this happened” (19 December 2012). Sarla (RB, 47, Jat), however, did not suffer silently she said that whenever her husband beat her, she refused to do the housework. “He would then apologise and would say he would not beat me again. He did and then I would do the same” (3 February 2013).

Two CRBs talked about how they felt like going away when they were first beaten. Three other CRBs said that their husbands would beat them and tell them to “go away”. They felt that they were beaten so much because their husbands were aware that they had nowhere to go. Interestingly, three RBs said something similar. Aarti (RB, 27, Chamar) told me: “I felt angry when he beat me but what difference does it make whether he beats you or keeps you *pareshān* [troubled]. You have to stay here, where can you go?” (13 February 2013). Having nowhere else to go, however, had different meanings for CRBs and RBs (see Chapter Seven). Yet the violence they experienced was not an outcome of their regional or CR status, but of the unequal power relations that legitimised this violence. I now move on to demonstrate the ways in which CRBs and RBs may feel supported, despite the violence and inequality that shapes the everyday lived reality of their marital relationships.

6.5. *Sāth Denā*: Meanings of a Supportive Relationship

When women spoke about their understanding of *sāth denā* [a supportive relationship] it became clear that they did feel supported in some ways even though their relationships were far from egalitarian. When I asked women who supports a woman after marriage, there seemed to be a consensus among them that it was a husband who does or who should support his wife. Ideas of support were central to women’s understandings of the meaning of marriage. Jagmati (RB, early 60s, Chamar), for instance, remarked: “A marriage is having a *jīvan sāthī*” [a life-partner or a companion for life] (1 August 2013) and meant “*rishtā nibhānā*” [maintaining a relationship/commitment]. What emerged in conversations over time was that most women felt supported on some matters but not others, and they articulated notions of *sāth dēnā* in different ways.

Informants, like Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar), assessed support from a husband in terms of the fulfilment of the provider role for the family. She commented:

My husband was *kālā* [literally black, used to describe dark skin]. He would not even walk with me. Others often made comments about my light skin in contrast to his. My husband earned and fed the family. He never raised a hand on me. For me, he was *barīyā* [very good]. What difference does skin colour make? He brought me whatever I asked for.

(28 February 2013)

In contrast, Jaya (CRB, 45, Jat) said: “I have faced difficulties throughout my married life because my husband is a drug addict. He has deteriorated over the years. He has never worked and fed the family. I did not have his *sāth* [support]” (13 July 2013). Studies show how the failure of a husband to meet expectations related to provision of material needs can be a major source of marital conflict and breakdown (Grover 2011; Vatuk 2015). The importance of material support emerged as particularly crucial in conversations with widowed informants who felt that the most difficult years were those following the death of husbands. Kajri (RB, 35, Jat), for instance, talked about how her husband was a drug addict and alcoholic and spent all his earnings on his drinking. She had eight children. Her neighbours made jokes saying that while her husband was alive, the only thing he did was produce children. She told me: “Happiness was not in my destiny, only beating”. Yet she shared how she felt that her life would nevertheless have been easier if her husband was alive. “He would have fulfilled his responsibilities. I had to go out to work to feed my children”. She told me on more than one occasion, “you must get married”. I asked her why, given her own experience and she said: “It is very difficult to go through life alone...*Dikh toh rahe the*” [at least I could see him] (30 January 2013). It became clear that what Kajri cherished was not the relationship but the idea and security of having a companion.

Others like Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar), also a widow, said: “I think that I am better off that my husband has died because while he was alive there was only fighting and beating. I could never talk to him when I felt sad. Other women’s husbands console them and reassure them but mine did not do anything” (13 July 2013). Hemlata expresses the expectation that a husband must share and talk about

feelings and problems and provide comfort. Sharing *sūkh dūkh* [joys and sorrows] figured in several informants' accounts of the meaning of *sāth denā*. Jamieson sees "privileged knowledge ('really knowing') – trust, faith that confidences will not be betrayed and privileged knowledge will not be used against the self" as a fundamental dimension of intimacy (1998: 9). Informants like Koyal and Jameela felt supported and intimate based on their ability to trust and confide in their husbands. Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) told me:

I have never hidden anything from my husband. I tell him everything. He even knows about the man who was interested in me before we got married. My *sās* is always accusing me of having a *yār* [lover] but my husband trusts me and has never raised this as an issue during a fight or in the presence of my in-laws.

(31 March 2013)

Jameela (CRB, 21, Teli) talked about confiding in her husband about her previous marriage in her native state and added: "He is the only one who knows this and he did not let this be known to anyone. If my *sās* found out, she would tell him to leave me" (19 June 2013). For Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli) *sāth dēnā* meant sharing but also *salāha karnā* [consulting each other/joint decision-making]. Informants like Shanti (RB, 24, Kumhar) felt supported because their husbands had shown understanding or consideration towards them and provided help or care (e.g. surrounding illness). She said: "When I fall ill, he tells me to lie down and he does the work. He brings me medicine and takes care of the children" (1 April 2013). Similarly, Mansi (CRB, 33, Chamar) said:

I have been ill for the last few months. My husband is handicapped. I used to go out to work as we could not manage on his earnings alone. He cannot do much work but he never says to me, why do you not do any work. He understands that I cannot because of my illness.

(19 March 2013)

Being supported during difficult times (e.g. losing children) was highly valued by some informants. Unlike these informants, Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) shared the lack of consideration that her husband had shown towards her throughout their married life.

I can be extremely unhappy but it makes no difference to him. Not all men are like this. If I tell my husband to bring vegetables from the market, he will tell me he cannot. If I ever fall ill, he never says, come I will take you to the doctor or lie down I will make you a cup of tea. My husband never said to me, let me bring you a set of clothes that you can wear. If he never supports me, *toh kyā mard?* [then what husband is he?].... I have to work and feed myself and pass my days here. I worry that in future if my hands and feet become useless, I cannot say about my children for certain but I know that my husband will not even give me food to eat.

(11 March 2013)

When Kalawati says, “*kyā mard?*” she is conveying her assessment that her husband had failed as he did not meet the expectation of providing support. Several women compared their husbands to other women’s husbands (“not all men are like this”) as though they were providing a rationale for thinking their expectations were reasonable. The above suggests that women valued small everyday practices of intimacy such as buying a set of clothes or making a cup of tea highly. One of the key findings of *The Enduring Love? Project* that focuses on long-term couple relationships in contemporary Britain was that “talking and listening”, “thoughtful gestures” and “small acts of kindness” were prized highly, with a “cup of tea” being singled out as significant (2013: 5-6). Women in Barampur had various visions of supportive relationships yet they spoke of them in ways similar to women elsewhere despite the very different context in which they lived their lives.

What was extremely significant for most women was whether or not their husbands spoke up for them and trusted their word over what others told them (e.g. when there were fights with their husband’s kin). Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) explained:

When a woman comes as a new bride then her *sās*, *nanad* [HZ] and *devar* [HyB] find fault and criticise her. Her husband should tell them not to say anything to her. That is *sāth denā*. If a woman wants to go to her natal home and her mother-in-law does not give her permission, her husband should tell his mother that he will send her. That is *sāth denā*. If there is too much fighting in the household, then he should support his wife and set up a separate household. That is *sāth denā*.

(14 August 2013)

Muneera (RB, 32, Lohar) felt that her husband had always been supportive – he had never beaten her and he stood by her in difficult times. She praised him saying:

“Unless there is a compromise between two people the marriage cannot work. My husband does not think that only the woman should make the adjustment. He agrees with me as well” (1 July 2013). Her only complaint was that if there was a dispute between Muneera and her unmarried *nanads* [HZ] her husband chose not to get involved.

I feel angry that he does not speak in support of me irrespective of what they say to me... Last month my husband wanted to buy gold earrings for me. My *sās* and *nanads* heard of it and started filling his ears. He changed his mind. I feel like sitting with my husband and sharing a meal. If we lived in a separate household, I could but now it is not possible. Sometimes my husband buys things for me, but he does not let it be known to his sisters.

(17 July 2013)

Muneera draws attention to something that has also been noted in writings on north Indian kinship: that a woman’s affinal kin attempt to prevent the development of a bond between husbands and wives. The sexual and emotional ties between spouses are seen as threatening to the unity of the patriline (Das 1976; Raheja and Gold 1994). This is clear in Koyal’s (RB, 16, Chamar) words: “His [husband’s] mother tells him, she came two days ago *aur uskī chūt* [vagina] *ke pīchay phir rāhā hai* [and you are running after her for sex]. Since you got married, you have forgotten who your mother is” (8 May 2013).

For women like Urmila (RB, 32, Jat), *sāth denā* meant fidelity. Urmila talked about how her husband had been in a relationship with another woman for the first 15 of the 18 years of their marriage. She stressed: “He stays with the woman he is married to and does not go to any other woman: that is *sāth dena*. I was very troubled...he would beat me and leave and go to her when he wanted” (29 May 2013). Thus, women saw joint family living and infidelity as preventing the development of intimacy with husbands. Urmila talked about her relationship changing over the course of her married life and “*pyār barnay lagā*” [love started growing between them]. “He tells me now that if he had realised how *bariyā* [good] I am, he would not have troubled me so much. Now he does not even eat food without me”, she said (29 May 2013). Writing on marriage in India, Mody states: “The construction of the relationship between love and marriage is that love should never precede marriage;

but equally, marriage does not preclude the possibility of a loving and intimate relationship...Love between husband and wife is expected to grow as the relationship develops” (2008:7-8). I did not ask informants about *pyār* [love] because I wanted to see whether this was something they brought up themselves when talking about husbands and the marital relationship. Of my informants, few (like Urmila above) mentioned love. Similarly, Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli) told me:

My husband really loves me. He beats me but he also loves me a lot. He beats me only when he is angry or I say something wrong. Usually, the beating is because of one issue – when I refuse sex. He always supported me when there was a fight with my in-laws. He never let them raise a hand to me. Today I returned from my natal home after five days. My husband came there to bring me back. He does not like it here without me. He gives me expenses, he makes me laugh, he sits and eats with me and our children and fetches water for me to bathe when I fall ill. This is good, isn’t it?

(10 May 2013)

Likewise, Komal (RB, 16, Chamar) said:

My husband says that I am the first woman that he has been in love with. He tells me that he becomes very sad when I go away from him [to my *pīhar*]. He cannot stay without me. My in-laws trouble me a lot but I am here because of him. He never stops me from talking to anyone. He even gives me his mobile phone to talk to my friends. He has never acted suspicious...He is *acchā* [nice] and loves me. He beats me only because he believes his mother and sister easily when they fill his ears. He only beats me because they make him.

(8 May 2013)

Jamieson argues that “elements of practices of intimacy can be transposable, that is, one practice of intimacy is sometimes able to stand in for others, making it as – if other practices of intimacy were also in place...” (2011: 2.7). Thus, for Sakeena and Koyal, everything that their husbands did for them within the context of their day-to-day lives – the small practices of intimacy and acts of kindness – despite the violence, was sufficient for them to perceive their relationship as “good” despite “deficits in the repertoire of practices of intimacy” (Jamieson 2011: 2.7).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on sexual relations, reproductive “choice” and marital violence (wife-beating, verbal abuse and controlling behaviour) to highlight for CRBs and RBs alike (across castes) the inequality of everyday marital relations. For women, sexual relations were experienced as difficult and defined by lack of choice in the early months, yet some came to experience sexual relations differently over the course of their married lives. Most women, however, suggested that sexual relations did not bring them pleasure, with factors such as lack of reproductive choice and control over fertility, violence, work and livelihood concerns and the absence of emotional intimacy having a bearing on how sexual relationships were experienced.

Women explained the lack of control over fertility and reproduction in terms of their lack of control over sexual relations. Women pointed to the lack of knowledge of or access to contraception, the husband’s consent as determining in decisions regarding the use of contraception, sterilisation or abortion, poverty, the pressure to produce a male child and the potential stigma of remaining childless. Some Muslim informants believed that Islam forbade them from using contraception. What emerged as significant with regard to marital violence was the extent to which it was normalised in women’s everyday lives, with women’s accounts of marital violence varying from “a slap here and there” to being beaten badly or excessively. Further, my findings draw attention to the role of not only female but also male affinal kin in perpetrating violence. For some informants, age/years of marriage was crucial, as the violence ceased as they progressed in their marital lives.

While marital relations are far from egalitarian and experienced as violent by many, women voiced not only recognition and at times a critique of the unequal power relations but also expressed a yearning for more equal and intimate relationships. As women moved to live in their husbands’ families and villages, marriage placed them in a vulnerable position. They voiced a desire for being supported by their husbands and articulated in different ways the meanings of *sāth denā*: fulfilling provider roles, sharing joys and sorrows, understanding, help, care, trust and fidelity. I argue that women are not entirely without support, or at least hope and they may experience some forms of intimacy even within contexts of inequality and violence. Their

yearnings may not be achieved in all ways, but when they talk about *sāth denā* there are glimpses of the importance of other, often small everyday practices of intimacy such as eating and laughing together or being brought water when ill. These experiences should not be written off as some kind of false consciousness but understood as complex ways in which women deal with the realities of their lives. Women endure, as Reader writes, "...because it is often not in their power to flee or fight...the lived reality of women's lives reveals this...Endurance is the only option. It is not action, it does not show positive capability, it is not chosen or independent...Far from being an easy or self-deluded option, endurance is difficult and courageous" (2007: 597). In the following chapter (Seven), I outline why in this north Indian context married women often do not have the option to "flee or fight".

CHAPTER SEVEN: RELATIONS WITH NATAL KIN

Women's personhood is unique, in that their ties are disjointed and then remade, while men's ties are extended and enduring.

(Lamb 1997: 289)

Introduction

In the two earlier chapters, I discussed aspects of RBs' and CRBs' everyday lives. In this chapter, by focusing on their relationships with their natal kin, I highlight that natal kin contact is not sought on a day-to-day basis by married women as their lives are located and lived in their affinal village where their in-laws, husbands and children and work are. Yet contact with natal kin is vital in the maintenance of affinal relations through gift-giving during festivals and life-cycle rituals, when women seek respite from work and the *sasurāl* [in-laws'/marital home] through visits, and especially in situations of crisis and conflict – marital dispute, breakdown and widowhood. The previous chapters outlined parallels in the experiences of CRBs and RBs. In this chapter, I point out contrasts between the lived experiences of RBs and CRBs by examining the frequency of visits, gift-giving and natal kin support.

7.1. Marriage Distance and Natal Kin

Contrasting the north and south Indian kinship systems, several studies have examined how different forms of marriage alliances related to women's contact with their natal kin following marriage. Karve ([1953] 1994) and Trautmann (1981) noted that the local exogamy and prohibition on close-kin marriage in the north meant the marriage of a daughter distantly to a complete stranger. In south India, in contrast, the preference for close-kin marriages meant the marriage of a daughter into a family not too far from her natal home. Trautmann argued that north Indian marriage entails "complete dissimilation of the bride from her family of birth and her complete assimilation to that of her husband" (1981: 291). Several ethnographic studies on north, north-western and central India, however, show that, even though a woman loses her rights in her natal home on marriage, the ties between a married woman and her natal kin are not completely severed (Jacobson 1977; Jeffery et al. 1988, 1996;

Madan 2002; Palriwala 1991; Raheja and Gold 1994; Sharma 1980; Wadley 1995). She is not completely dissimilated from her natal kin as Trautmann (1981) argued.

Like the above studies, Dyson and Moore (1983) contrasted the demographic regimes of north and south India and explored the relationship between marriage distance, kin support and women's autonomy. They argued that the greater distances over which marriages are arranged in the north as compared to the south, "tend to constrain or erode the personal links between a married woman and her natal kin" (1983: 46). Further, they assert that the absence of support structures diminishes women's autonomy. One problematic aspect of Dyson and Moore's argument is that it reflects a Hindu bias. Muslims in the north permit both intra-village marriages as well as (preferential) marriages between close-kin (see Jeffery 1979).

Moreover, distance from natal kin is only one element in married women's relations with their natal kin. This has been highlighted by Jeffery et al. (1988) in their study in Bijnor district. They compare Hindus (married distantly) and Muslims (married into nearby villages). Whilst Muslim women usually did not favour intra-village marriage, they saw being married close to their natal kin (in nearby villages) to be an advantage as they felt less cut off than Hindu women. Yet Jeffery et al. (1988) see a range of factors, other than how distantly a woman is married, as determining the contact she has with her natal kin. These include: seeking permission of her husband and older affinal kin, finding a substitute to do the work in her absence and having someone to chaperon her to her natal village.

Writings on south India and on close-kin marriage also question studies that have "dichotomised women's status along a north-south divide based on different descent principles", maintaining that such generalisations are "at variance with local and regional patterns" (Philips 2005: 108-109). Studies on close-kin marriages in south India (Kapadia 1995; Vera Sanso 1995) and among Muslim (diasporic) communities (Mirza 2015) show that a woman's natal kin may be unwilling to support her for fear that they might jeopardise previously existing kin ties. Studies also note that close-kin marriages do not necessarily imply better treatment for women or protection against violence (Mirza 2015; Rao 2015). While studies demonstrate that marriage distance is not the only factor in determining access to kin support, a significant issue

highlighted in the literature is that men may not welcome proximity to their wife's kin. Men may view close marriage as posing a threat to a "husband's rule" (Jeffery et al. 1989: 36) and as enhancing a woman's bargaining ability by placing her in an advantageous position with her parents and siblings "close at hand" (Charsley 2005: 94; see also Mohammad 2015).

Studies have also focused on how the natal kin support that a woman can access depends on the type of marriage she enters, i.e., an arranged marriage or love marriage. In her study of women in a low income neighbourhood in Delhi, Grover (2011) noted that women in love marriages, having exercised choice, had limited or no rights to avail themselves of parental refuge. In contrast, women in arranged marriages routinely sought refuge at their natal homes in situations of conflicts with husbands and affines. While Grover's central argument about parental refuge and conjugal stability is problematic, as I argue elsewhere (Chaudhry 2013), her work highlights how parental refuge could place a woman in a relatively powerful position to negotiate with her husband. She argues that because of parental support women "can just walk out" of their conjugal homes when domestic arrangements become strained (Grover 2011: 110).

In this chapter, I take forward the discussion on women's post-marital natal kin contact by comparing CRBs and RBs. Much of the literature has focused on the repercussions of marriage distance for women or has outlined the factors that determine a married woman's ability to access natal kin support. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: *first*, I examine the implications of distance by focusing on CRBs for whom marriage entails not only village and territorial exogamy (as it does for all women in the rural north) but rather migration over hundreds of miles. *Second*, I highlight the significance of natal kin support for a married woman by focusing on how its absence places women, who cannot avail themselves of such support (mainly CRBs but also some RBs), in a particularly vulnerable position. By discussing cases of RBs who cannot call on their natal kin, I highlight both that distance alone does not determine contact with natal kin but also that a woman's ability to access natal kin support may change over the course of her married life.

7.2. Visits to the Natal home

For RBs in Barampur, the frequency of visits to the *pīhar* [natal home] decreased over the course of their married lives influenced by a range of factors that I outline in this section. The first visit to the *pīhar* would take place a few days after the wedding when a RB's natal kin came to her *sasurāl* to collect her. Apart from two informants, all had made frequent visits to their *pīhar*, some more than others, in the first year or early years of marriage. Visits by a young bride to her *pīhar* eased the process of transition (from *pīhar* to *sasurāl*) and adjustment in the *sasurāl* (see 5.1), also noted by earlier ethnographic accounts (Jacobson 1977; Palriwala 2001). During my fieldwork, almost all informants, at different stages of their married lives, said following the early years they started visiting their *pīhar* once or twice a year or only once in two years. Only two visited once or twice a month but they either returned the same day or stayed only for a few days. Of them, Aarti (RB, 27, Chamar) explained her frequent visits to her *pīhar* in terms of its proximity to her *sasurāl*. Ritu (RB, 25, Jat) visited often to care for her ill elderly mother in the absence of another woman in her *pīhar*, as her brothers were unmarried.

Unlike Ritu, for most women in Barampur, a visit to the *pīhar* was a time of rest that offered them respite from work. In their study in Bijnor, Jeffery and Jeffery (1996) found that women complained about their *nanads* [HZ] when they visited as they treated their time in the *pīhar* as a holiday, mainly from housework. In Barampur, eight of the nineteen RBs interviewed said that their brothers' wives did not let them work when they visited their *pīhar*. It was only during lengthy stays that they helped with work. In her study in a central Indian village, Jacobson (1977) found that married women constantly moved back and forth between their natal and marital homes and served as a shifting labour supply, particularly in poor agricultural households. Similarly, in her study in a Rajasthan (north-west India) village, Palriwala questions the notion of "women as fixed residents of their conjugal homes" (1991: 2763). She shows how the phase in the life of young married women described as "*aoni jaoni*" [coming-going], when women stay for alternate periods of varying length in their natal and marital homes, allowed both sets of kin to access their labour. In Barampur, none of my RB informants engaged in paid or agricultural

work on family fields while they visited their *pīhar*, such as has been documented in these studies.

RBs explained that they could go to their *pīhar* only if their in-laws, particularly the *sās* [HM/mother-in-law], gave them permission to go. Younger women, in the early years of marriage, had to rely either on their husbands to drop them or on a relative being sent from the *pīhar* to take them from the *sasurāl*, as also noted by Jeffery et al. (1988) (see 7.1). As women grew older and their mobility increased, they could travel on their own. The most common reason for not being allowed to go was household responsibilities or if the *sās* or someone in the *sasurāl* was ill. Women usually started their married lives in joint households where work was shared. Visits to the *pīhar* became shorter and less frequent once they set up nuclear households, as they became solely responsible for work – housework, cattle-work and childcare. As discussed earlier (see 5.2), poor Kumhar, Chamar and Teli women also worked as casual labourers contributing to the sustenance of their households. For those Chamar women who worked in the brick-kilns, visits to the *pīhar* were possible only at the end of the brick-making season that lasted for six to eight months.

Across castes, women visited their *pīhar* and could be visited in their *sasurāl* by their fathers and brothers except when women were pregnant and their pregnancy became visible, because of *sharm* [shame]. Vatuk explains that this *sharm* relates to a woman's desire to avoid the situation of her parents having to acknowledge her sexuality and to keep her role as daughter and hence as *kanyā* [literally virgin] distinct from her role as a wife and mother (1982: 74). Jeffery et al. (1989) argue that as a married woman relied heavily on the support of her natal kin, her inability to visit them during the advanced state of pregnancy meant a lack of autonomy for her (Jeffery et al. 1989: 72-73). For RBs in Barampur, not being able to visit their *pīhar* during pregnancy meant not getting respite from the constraints of the *sasurāl* for a period of time.

Visits became fewer once the number of children increased and as daughters became *jawān* [mature] and could not be left at home. Women talked about how visits became even more occasional after parents passed away, and once brothers were married the brother-sister bond weakened. Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar) said that the

pīhar only felt *apnā* [one's own] as long as parents were alive. Similarly, Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) shared how she felt like a burden on her brother now that her parents had passed away. Shazia (RB, early 70s, Lohar) talked about how there was no one in the *pīhar* left to visit as not only her parents but even her brothers had died. She last visited her *pīhar* several years ago for her nephew's wedding.

Informants also suggested that husbands had come to have a greater say than before as opposed to senior members of the family in decisions regarding a woman's visits to her *pīhar*. What was also implied was the greater sexual restraint and *sharm* that men of earlier generations had as opposed to young married men who openly asserted their right to sexual relations with their wives. Kripa (RB, 75, Jat) remarked: "When I first got married, I would go and live at my *pīhar* for as long as four to six months but the men of today are not willing to leave their wives in the *pīhar* even for two days" (17 May 2013). Two Muslim respondents said something similar.

As far as visits by the natal kin were concerned, it was male members from the *pīhar*, usually the father and/or brother who visited a woman in her *sasurāl*. It was not considered appropriate for a woman's mother to visit her. A mother only visited, for instance, to express condolence when there was a death in the daughter's marital family. Women met their married sisters on occasions such as weddings in their natal or marital families. Given household responsibilities, it was rare that married sisters visited their *pīhar* at the same time (see also Jeffery et. al 1989). It was also unusual for women to visit their married sisters in their *sasurāl*. Three informants had sisters who were also married in Barampur. Of them, two visited their sisters or were visited by them infrequently because their in-laws and husbands did not allow it. The third saw her sister frequently as she was an elderly widow no longer requiring permission from those in her *sasurāl*.

As for CRBs, my findings suggest variations among them with regard to natal kin contact. Some studies argue that "bought brides" were unlikely to or were not allowed to visit or maintain contact with their natal kin (Jeffery et al. 1989; Chowdhry 2005; Kant and Pandey 2003). Blanchet (2008) noted that brides were denied the right to visit their natal homes on the ground that their husbands had made a payment for them. Also, being married to men belonging to a different religion

made return to the natal home difficult. Kaur (2012) in her study of Bangladeshi and Bengali brides in eastern UP points out that the latter were better placed as compared to the former. Husbands of Bangladeshi brides were unable or not inclined to visit Bangladesh as, being a different country, visiting posed additional difficulties (cf. Kaur 2012: 87). Some other studies show that CRBs maintained contact and visited their natal homes, even if not frequently (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Kaur 2004; Mishra 2013).

In Barampur, CRBs could be placed in three categories as far as visits to their natal kin were concerned. *First*, those who had made visits to their natal homes more than once and talked to me about an impending visit. Most CRBs could be placed in this category. This included brides who had visited two to five times since they had been married, those who went to their natal home once a year (as did most RBs) and exceptions, such as Deepa (early 30s, Kumhar, F), who had acted as a go-between for several marriages from her natal home in Jharkhand that made it possible for her to visit her natal home three to five times a year. As the travel expenses for a go-between were met by the groom (see 4.2), arranging a marriage served as an incentive for a CRB to visit her natal home, also noted by earlier studies on CRM (Kukreja and Kumar 2013; Mishra 2013).

In the *second* category are brides who had visited more than once but had not been to their natal homes for more than 20 years, such as Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar). She told me:

Earlier *dil dūkhtā thā* [my heart would ache] thinking about my natal kin. I would tell him [husband] to take me once to meet my family but he never did. He would say we will go on *Diwālī*, on *Holī* [Hindu festivals]...he kept putting it off with excuses. Then I gave up hope. I no longer think about my family because my parents are not there. I received a letter a few years ago about my elder brother's death and I do not know if my younger brother is still alive. If I go, where will I go? My brother's children were young when I left...they must have grown up now...they will not recognise me.

(11 February 2013)

For CRBs like Kalawati, ties with her natal kin were eventually severed. Baldassar in her work on transnational families in Italy and Australia discusses the significance of visits and “co-presence to sustain relationships”. She writes: “Seeing each other also

reassures people that their kin haven't changed a bit, that they remain just the same, that despite the distance, they still have a son or daughter, mother or father" (2007: 404, 406). Chhaya (CRB, 55, Kumhar), like Kalawati, had not visited her natal home for 26 years. Unlike Kalawati, however, she had managed to re-establish ties with her natal family. She told me:

Within the first year of marriage I visited my *pīhar* twice, both times to arrange marriages. Then my husband did not take me for 26 years. I was *dūkhī* [sad] for all those years. For that reason, I decided to go with Durga [CRB also from Bengal] without telling my husband. I told my youngest son and he went to drop me to the railway station. Shakuntala [a Jat woman in the neighbourhood] gave me the train fare. I had no trouble finding my natal home. My husband used to tell me not to go there because my relatives would not recognise me, but my brothers did. Everyone from the village came to see me. When I arrived there, I learnt that my mother had died three years earlier... My natal family did not contact me for all those years because they did not have the address. My *māmā* [MB] who had come to drop me here after my wedding had died.

(12 March 2013)

Like Chhaya, four CRBs talked about how they did not learn about the deaths of parents or siblings until they went back to visit. In her work on transnational families, Baldassar found that concerns about divulging information to loved ones about emotional health, illness and death, to ensure they did not worry them, were common. Visits were regarded as particularly important in helping to resolve some of the tensions associated with "truth and distance" (2007: 403).

In the *third* category are CRBs who never returned to their natal homes to visit and had no contact with their kin. This includes women like Kanchan (CRB, 21, Chamar) who had run away from her home in Bihar with her cousin [FeBD] who was intending to elope with a man from another village in Baghpat. Her cousin arranged a marriage for Kanchan in Barampur. Kanchan had tried to contact her parents but they were unwilling to communicate with her. Her husband told me that her family could cause him harm if he took her to visit them because they would assume that he had eloped with Kanchan. She regretted running away and shared how she felt extremely alone. She told me: "They say I dishonoured them. I cannot go there and show my face. What difference does it make if I am happy or not. I do not have parents

anymore, I have no one...you tell me, where can I go?" (1 August 2013). Similarly, for Samita (CRB, early 30s, Chamar) her kin were absent. Her account of how she came to Barampur suggested that she was kidnapped as a minor and brought to Barampur by someone unknown to her (see 3.10). She had been in Barampur for 17 years (since 1995) and felt that her family in West Bengal probably thought that she was dead and had given up searching for her several years ago. She added:

I do not know what happened to my mother – whether she is dead or alive. I will die and no one from my natal family will know. In the neighbourhood, when I see that some woman's brother has come to visit her, I feel like crying. My son will get married and no one will come from my natal home. It has been so many years yet even now I cry when I think of my parents. *Mā bābā kī bahut yād ātī hai* [I think about my mother and father a lot]. Who will take me there?... I no longer remember where my house is, otherwise by now I would have left and gone there by myself.

(4 December 2012)

For CRBs who had visited their natal home, the first visit took place only after they had had their first child or children. Unlike RBs, CRBs, as new brides, could not avail of frequent visits to their natal homes to ease the process of adjustment. Thus, for them the difficulty of having to adjust in a culturally and linguistically alien context was intensified by isolation from their natal kin. Studies on CRM point out that CRBs were allowed to visit their natal kin once they had children but their children were kept behind to ensure that the CRBs returned to their *sasurāl* (Blanchet 2008; Kukreja and Kumar 2013). In Barampur, CRBs also told me that they felt that visits to the natal home were delayed until after children were born for fear that they might not return. For the first visit, however, their husbands and children accompanied them to their *pīhar*.

Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) talked about her experience:

The first time I went to my natal home was five years after marriage. People in Bengal had started saying to my parents, 'you sold her that is why she does not come to visit, she must have died or they must have killed her'. I used to talk to my mother at the phone booth in the village and cry on the phone. She would tell me, 'this is what people are saying here, come once so that they believe us'... When men go from here to Bengal to marry, they tell the parents that they will bring the daughter to visit twice a year. This is what my husband had said to my parents and he only took me after I had two children.

When I go there, my parents cry a lot. They say that they long to see me. My in-laws do not even let me go once in two years.

(17 December 2012)

The first time I met Varsha, she told me that she would visit her natal home next for her younger sister's wedding. Her sister got married ten months later, but she was unable to go as her in-laws said that they could not afford the train fare. "If they refused to give me the money, where could I get it from?" (12 December 2012).

What emerged in conversations with all CRBs was that both distance and the cost of travelling over long distances were crucial in determining their visits to their natal homes. CRBs said that when they "agreed" to a marriage in UP (see Chapter Three, Part Two), they did not fathom how far it was and that they might not be able to return to visit home. As Schein in her study of long-distance, inter-provincial marriages in China notes: "What they had not comprehended, or bargained for, was the sheer physicality of space that made home so far away" (2005: 62). Like Varsha, four CRBs said that when their husbands went to marry them in their native states they assured their parents that they would bring them back to visit twice a year – a promise they did not keep. Jameela (CRB, 21, Teli) contrasted her situation with RBs. "My *nanad* [HZ] only spends ₹25 when she visits her *pīhar*, while I need ₹2000-3000 to go [to Jharkhand]" (9 June 2013). Mansi (CRB, 33, Chamar) explained that for the poor like her husband, financing a trip to another state was a major expense.

In so much poverty, how can I spend ₹3000 to go there? I have been ill for several months. I need to have an ultrasound. I do not have ₹400 for it. Should I spend what my husband earns to feed my children or travel to my *pīhar*?

(14 March 2013)

Mansi shared how she could not visit her *pīhar* as often as she would have liked, yet she felt comforted by the support that she had from her *jethānī* [HeBW] who took Mansi with her to her own *pīhar* for visits. Similarly, Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar) told me how she had taken two of her *devrānī's* [HyBW] (both CRBs) with her to her *pīhar* on several occasions over the years.

For CRBs, both money and distance were the reason why they could not attend weddings in their natal families. The cost of travel also made it difficult for them to take all their children with them to visit their *pīhar*. It was usually one child or the younger ones who were taken. Some CRBs said that their children had never visited their natal homes. Other than distance and monetary considerations, CRBs outlined various reasons, such as not being literate or widowhood that hampered women from travelling alone. Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar), a widow, explained: “I can go if someone takes me there. I cannot even tell if the train goes to Delhi or Guwahati or Mumbai or Meerut. It is not only me who never goes; none of them [other CRBs from Assam] go” (15 December 2012). Like Hemlata, other CRBs, also widows, said that they had not visited their natal families since their husbands died. Unlike Hemlata, not all CRBs were illiterate. Yet they said that they felt incapable of finding their way independently due to the distance such travel entailed.

Like RBs, CRBs also explained their inability to visit their native states due to the *sās* [HM] being ill or elderly and hence unable to work, and cattle or children that had to be looked after and could not be left in anyone else’s care in their absence. For CRBs, however, distance created additional difficulties. Jaya (CRB, 45, Jat) explained:

I cannot leave my *sās*. My *nanad* [HZ] tells me, ‘you will go so far and I cannot stay for so many days’. Her children are young. If it was near, I could have gone for five days but it will take me five days just to travel to and from Bengal.

(1 April 2013)

As discussed earlier, even though RBs sometimes did not visit their *pīhar* for as long as two years, CRBs were of the opinion that if they were married in their native states, they would visit their parents frequently. Unlike RBs, even if CRBs learnt about a death or illness in their natal families, they were either unable to go or could go only much later. Another contrast between RBs and CRBs was that the latter could not seek refuge in their *pīhar* when they wanted respite from work. Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) said: “When I fall ill, I think: if my *pīhar* was nearby I could have gone there or maybe my sister would have come to help out but no one can come...it is far away” (5 December 2013).

As far as visits by the natal kin of CRBs to their *sasurāl* are concerned, some brides had no contact with their natal kin and hence no one visited them from their *pīhar*. Two others had visited their natal families after marriage, but their relatives had never visited them in Barampur. The kin of twelve of the nineteen CRBs interviewed had visited them at least once in Barampur. Two CRBs with married children said that someone from their natal family had attended their children's weddings. When their natal kin visited, they stayed at the CRBs' homes because the distance prevented returning on the same day. This would not be acceptable for the kin of a RB, given the north Indian prohibition on accepting hospitality from a daughter's in-laws (see 7.3).

I also questioned CRBs and RBs alike about how they got and sent news to their natal kin if visits were not frequent. During my fieldwork, almost every household in Barampur owned a mobile phone. Jeffrey and Doron (2013) note the significance of mobile phones for newly married women as they adjust to life in their new households. All RBs said that they communicated with their natal kin, including their married sisters through mobile phones. Natal kin contact became more frequent after mobile phones were available, with RBs stating that they communicated with their natal families at least a few times in a month. Prior to this, news was communicated through letters. Some non-literate informants said that they relied on others to write letters or often asked an employee at the post-office to do so. They also received news when a relative visited on festivals or an in-married woman in Barampur belonging to the same natal village returned from visiting her *pīhar*. If news had to be communicated urgently (such as in case of death), someone was sent from the *pīhar* or *sasurāl*. Elderly informants said that the family *nāī* [barber] was the medium through which news was communicated in the past.

Like RBs, nine of the nineteen CRBs communicated with their natal families through mobile phones. Four CRBs said that they also got news when another CRB married in Barampur or a neighbouring village visited their native states. Seven CRBs talked about how their husbands sent letters from Barampur and that their fathers or brothers wrote from their natal homes before mobile phones. Older CRBs who had maintained contact with their natal kin since they first moved to Barampur, said that

it felt as though their kin were closer once mobile phones became available to them. Maya (CRB, mid-40s, Chamar), for instance, was married in the early 1980s. She told me:

Earlier we sent letters from here. It took several days to reach them. Yesterday I had a feeling that something had happened there [in Bengal] – maybe my mother died or my father was ill so I used my son’s mobile phone to call my brother. I felt relieved to know that they are all okay.

(19 March 2013)

Radha (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) talked about how she had lost contact with her natal family after her husband died in 2008. She had lost the mobile phone number of her natal family and could not visit them as there was no one who could accompany her there. There was no other CRB from her native village married in Barampur. Lakshmi (CRB, late 40s, Kumhar) said that her sons owned mobile phones, but she could not communicate with members of her natal family because they could not speak Hindi and she could no longer speak Bengali. Others, like Jaya (CRB, 45, Jat), had no news from her natal family because she had not visited them for over 20 years and could not send or receive letters because her natal kin could not read Hindi. She compared her situation to her *nanad*’s [HZ] (a RB) and said: “She is married in Bijnor [neighbouring district] and she has not come to Barampur for two years but she calls and finds out if everything is okay. I cannot even do that.” (13 July 2013). Jaya had lost contact with her kin several years ago.

In sum, while all RBs maintained contact with their natal kin through visits (even if they were not frequent), there were variations between CRBs in this respect – some were able to visit as frequently as two to three times a year, others every few years, some others had lost and resumed contact through visits whilst a few had never returned to visit since they moved to live in Barampur. For most RBs, the frequency of visits decreased as they advanced in their married lives. Yet a significant difference between RBs and CRBs was that distance made the CRBs’ presence at weddings, during illness and death in their natal families virtually impossible.

7.3. Relations between Affines and Gift-Giving

Drawing on Levi-Strauss' (1969) theory of marriage alliance, Dumont (1957, 1966) argued that marriage establishes an asymmetrical relationship between wife-givers and wife-takers with the latter being superior to the former. This is expressed in gift-giving, deference and hospitality with the kin of the wife being "perpetual donors" to the kin of the husband (Vatuk 1975: 159). Karve writes: The giving and receiving of gifts reflects the familial aspect rather than the individual aspect of the transaction – that marriage is very much a relationship between two families rather than between two individuals (1953: 63). Studies show that a woman's ties with her natal kin are sustained through gift-giving, starting at the wedding and continuing through the course of her married life (Jeffery 1979; Jeffery et al. 1989, 1996; Madan 2002; Raheja 1988; Palriwala 2001, 2009). Gifts in the early years of marriage are regarded as especially important as they help to secure a woman's place in her conjugal home (Vatuk 1975) (see 2.4.1).

In Barampur, a RB received gifts or cash each time she visited her *pīhar* or her natal kin visited her in her *sasurāl*. A *kothlī* [gifts of clothing and sweets] was given on festive occasions (*Holī*, *Tīj* and *Bhāt Duj* among Hindus and *Eid* among Muslims). There was *chūchak* [gifts following child-birth] and *bhāt* [given at the marriage of children]. This was the practice across castes, both Hindu and Muslim. Gift-giving was influenced by a range of factors that included the economic status of the woman's natal family, the years of marriage and whether a woman's parents were still alive. Women said that in the first year of marriage they received large amounts of gifts, including those for their husband's kin. In the first year, a *kothlī* was sent on all festive occasions but as the years passed, poor families sent it only once a year.

Status concerns were also significant. Poor Jats, for instance, gave much more to daughters than poor Chamars. RBs of different castes said that while women continued to receive gifts on visits even as they grew older and/or were widowed, they stopped receiving a *kothlī* once their mothers died. Also, the pressure to give to daughters was reduced once the *sās* passed away. The amount given also depended on the number of married sisters a woman had. Muneera (RB, 32, Lohar), for instance, talked about how her parents sent her a *kothlī* on *Eid*. She said that her

parents gave a good amount and yet she was taunted by her *sās*: “My in-laws spend ₹10,000 on a *kothlī* for their daughter; they give a lot because they only have to give to one daughter. My parents have to give to seven” (17 July 2013).

The amount also depended on what a RB’s mother received from her own natal family. I was told by several RBs that they passed on whatever they received from their natal families to their daughters. Birth-order and sex of a woman’s children were also vital. *Chūchak*, for instance, was usually given for the first two children. If the first two were daughters, then gifts were also given at the birth of a son. In poor families, it was given only at the birth of a boy child. Given the persisting son-preference, the gifts given at the birth of a son far exceeded those given at the birth of a daughter. *Bhāt* was the support extended by a woman’s natal kin in the marriage of her children. More was given for a daughter’s than a son’s wedding to help with the dowry.

As the relationship between the kin of the bride and groom was asymmetrical, gifts moved in one direction, although there were occasions when gifts flowed in the opposite direction. When women were married at younger ages, in the period between the wedding and *gaunā* [cohabitation], a woman’s marital kin visited her at her *pīthar* on festive occasions with a *kothlī*. This was reversed once she moved to live in her *sasurāl* with her brother/s visiting her with a *kothlī*. On such occasions, she gave them two meters of cloth to reciprocate. In her work in a village in Saharanpur (neighbouring) district in UP, Raheja (1988) found that among the dominant caste (Gujars) a *kothlī* was sent in both directions. Vatuk writes: “While recipient status does not entirely rule out the giving of small solicitory prestations to bride-givers (and indeed such are expected on certain occasions), it does mean that the over-whelming balance of presentations should be kept in favour of the bride-taking group” (Vatuk 1975: 160).

With regard to gift-giving in CRM, some studies have argued that relations between affines are non-existent in such marriages (Chowdhry 2005) and that “bought brides” do not receive gifts from their natal kin, unlike other brides (Jeffery and Jeffery 1996: 231). Kaur (2012) in her comparative work on Bengali and Bangladeshi brides argues that while affinal relationships cannot develop in the case of the latter, for

Bengali brides, there is sometimes gift-giving and exchange between families. In Barampur, nine of the nineteen CRBs interviewed said that they received gifts of clothing when they visited their natal homes, but that parents in their native states did not give as much to daughters as they did in UP. Some, like Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat), dealt with the expectations in a different way. She saved up small amounts from the monthly *kharchā* [expenses] that her husband handed to her and managed to accumulate enough before her visit to her natal home. She said:

Here they give a lot to married daughters. The first time I went to my natal home my brother gave me two *dhotīs* [*sārīs*], clothes and shoes for my children, a silver chain for my son and anklets for my daughter. My parents are very poor. When I went to my *pīhar* the second time, I took ₹2000 from here and bought a set of clothes each for myself and my children from it. I told my *sās* [HM] and husband that my parents gave those gifts.

(12 December 2012)

None of the CRBs, however, had received *chūchak* or a *kothlī* from their natal kin in the course of their married lives. As far as *bhāt* is concerned, four CRBs said that no one from their natal families came to Barampur when their children got married. One said that she did not ask her natal kin to come, because they would have had to make *bhāt* payments/gifts and they could not afford to. Another CRB said that *bhāt* was given by her nephew who came to Barampur from Maharashtra to attend her son's wedding. Faiza (CRB, late 40s, Lohar), talked about how her mother attended her daughter's wedding, but was too poor to give anything. She told me: "Here they give *bhāt*. My husband bought a few sets of clothes to show to the relatives that my mother had given something for the wedding so that no one would say that I am a *Bihārī* [from Bihar] and nothing came from my *pīhar*" (21 March 2013). As discussed, the gifts a RB received from her natal kin depended in part on what her mother received from her own natal family. Likewise, Faiza (CRB, late 40s, Lohar) explained her inability to provide her daughter with gifts as related both to her husband's poverty but also to not receiving any gifts from her natal family. She told me:

When she [daughter] comes to visit she returns *khālī-hāth* [empty-handed]. Her *sās* tells her that she has come without anything from her mother's house, but where can we give from? She visits every month and sometimes twice a

month. I was forced to give when her son was born because of *sharm* [shame].

(21 March 2013)

Ethnographic studies note that the obligation for parents to provide a married daughter with gifts when she visits often inhibits poor parents from inviting her for frequent visits (Jeffery et al. 1988; Jacobson 1977). Unlike Faiza, other CRBs with married daughters said that they gave gifts to daughters on festive occasions and when they visited. Maya (CRB, mid-40s, Chamar), as did some RBs, pointed out that due to poverty she stopped sending her daughters a *kothlī* after the first few years of marriage.

As discussed earlier, a RB and her in-laws may reciprocate the gifts received on some occasions, but it was usually considered extremely shameful for a woman's kin to accept anything including hospitality from their affines (see discussion on *kanyādān* 2.1). Karve noted that in north India, a father is not expected to accept even food at his daughter's marital home when he goes to visit her. "The relationship is that of givers and receivers. One who gives the daughter should not receive anything" (Karve 1993: 58-59). During my fieldwork, respondents married for over 30 years (before the early 1980s) said that their fathers did not and still do not accept food in their *sasurāl* but their brothers did. Young married women, however, said that this prohibition no longer existed. Accepting hospitality at a daughter's *sasurāl* was also influenced by whether she lived jointly with her *sās*. Ritu (RB, 25, Jat), for instance, explained that her mother did not accept food and water in Ritu's *sasurāl*, but did in Ritu's sister's because her sister's in-laws were no longer alive. As mentioned earlier (see 7.2), in contrast to RBs, this prohibition did not exist for the natal kin of CRBs who stayed at their daughters'/sisters' homes when they visited.

Further, some studies on CRM argue that the brides' husbands had not only met the wedding expenses but in some cases continued to extend financial support to the parents of the brides even after the wedding (cf. Chaudhry and Mohan 2011: 331; Kaur 2010: 17; Mukherjee 2013: 45). In Barampur, with the exception of two CRBs, others said that neither was the direction of gift-giving reversed (from *sasurāl* to *pīhar*) nor did their husbands extend financial help to their natal families. Varsha

(CRB, 28, Jat) said that her brother had asked her husband for money to help with the marriage of her younger sister in Bengal, but that her husband had refused. Similarly, Faiza (CRB, late 40s, Lohar) said that her natal kin had sought her husband's (financial) help to re-build their house in her natal state. She added: "I told them, where can we give from? Even we are poor here" (21 March 2013). Two CRBs, however, said that after their fathers passed away and their mothers visited them in their *sasurāl*, their husbands gave their mothers a small sum of money before they returned. In a RM, it would be unthinkable for a woman's natal kin to ask her in-laws for such support. Yet her affinal kin often continued to make demands on her natal kin, as the cases below demonstrate. Urmila's (RB, 32, Jat) told me:

In my dowry I brought a bed, television, twenty one *sārīs*, hundred and one utensils and a gold necklace for my *sās*. I did not bring sets of bedding as is the custom here. My father is poor. He gave whatever he could yet my *sās* said that I did not bring anything. Two years after my wedding my daughter was born. My father sold some of his land and gave whatever my *sās* asked for because her taunts were increasing by the day.

(28 May 2013)

The expectations were not only with regard to gifts but for meeting other expenses as well. Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) explained: "My in-laws wanted me to rely on my natal kin for everything. They would not even pay for things like my son's school fee or his uniform. They would say, ask your natal kin" (12 October 2012). Similarly, Kusum (RB, 47, Chamar) said: "When I lived jointly with my in-laws they refused to pay for my treatment when I fell ill. They would say, call your natal kin and ask them to take you" (14 February 2013).

RBs like Urmila were taunted for not bringing enough (see 2.4.1). Likewise, CRBs like Pushpa (CRB, late 30s, Jat) talked about constantly being taunted and harassed by her *sās* because her natal kin did not give her anything. Jameela (CRB, 21, Teli) talked about being taunted by her *sās* for not bringing a dowry but she had never been taunted about a *kothlī*. She told me that her *sās* understood that it was not possible for her kin to travel over a long-distance to deliver a *kothlī*.

Thus, in RM, a woman's natal kin continued to provide her with gifts through the course of her married life. This was not the same for CRBs, although gift-giving was

not completely absent for some CRBs. Yet for CRBs, there was some acceptance on the part of their in-laws that their natal kin could not or would not provide. RBs, in comparison, were more vulnerable as the expectations and demands were based on the possibilities that a woman's natal kin could contribute to enhancing the conjugal fund.

7.4. Accessing Natal Kin Support

Studies on western contexts have addressed why women stay in, leave or return to violent relationships and outline the various personal, social and material factors that influence their decisions to do so (cf. Dobash and Dobash 1979). In rural contexts such as this, women neither inherit their husbands' (until they are widowed) nor their fathers' property. Nor do they have an income or maintenance that provides them with economic independence or the right of abode in the marital home in the event of marital breakdown. A life outside of marriage is not an option available to them. Natal (mainly male) kin support is then extremely crucial for women to have any bargaining power or agency in situations of marital crisis and distress.

Ethnographic studies point to the importance of natal kin support for a married woman. They show that in times of marital distress a woman may seek refuge at her parental home and refuse to return to her *sasurāl*. This enables her to negotiate better treatment for herself from her husband and in-laws in future (Jacobson 1977; Jeffery et al. 1989; Jeffery 2001). In Barampur as well, in situations of marital distress a RB could seek the intervention of her natal kin. Her kin would first attempt to talk to her husband and in-laws to negotiate better treatment for her. If they failed, the daughter would be taken back to her *pīhar* until her husband or a relative from her *sasurāl* came to collect her and promised to treat her well. RBs, across castes, however, pointed out that they could seek refuge at their *pīhar* only for some time but they could not live there permanently. Eventually they had to return to their *sasurāl*. If reconciliation proved impossible, a woman was remarried: it was unlikely that she remained at her *pīhar* as an unattached woman.

Of the nineteen RBs interviewed, nine said that they had sought refuge at their *pīhar* at some stage of their married lives, with the period of refuge varying from a

fortnight to two to four months to three years, with the exceptional case of one RB who sought refuge for 16 years. Kripa (RB, 75, Jat), for instance, talked about how she learnt about her husband's relationship with his widowed *bhābhī* [HBW] after Kripa had two children and she left to live at her *pīhar* with her children for three months. She returned on her own initiative so that her children would inherit their father's property. Refuge, then, offered women the possibility to recoup and return to their marriages. Like Kripa, four RBs said that they returned to their *sasurāl* after seeking refuge at their *pīhar* as their children had rights only to their husbands' property.¹⁵

RBs often talked about how a woman's place was in her husband's home post-marriage and not in her *pīhar*. They said they felt like a burden on their brothers (as they became economically dependent on them) after their parents passed away and so were hesitant to call on them for support. They stressed that a married daughter eventually had to return to her *sasurāl* for the sake of her parent's *izzat* [honour]. Kripa explained: "If a woman does not return, people say, look at their daughter *chōr rakhī hai*" [her husband left her] (19 May 2013).

Some RBs explained why they had never sought refuge at their *pīhar*. Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli) said that she never considered it because it would have resulted in *badnāmī* [bad reputation] for her parents. She added: "My mother told me, a woman who cares for her parents' honour does not return to her *pīhar* in a fight. She makes her marriage work" (4 April 2013). Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) did not tell her parents about her problems because she did not want to make them unhappy, especially as they were burdened with the responsibility of getting her five younger sisters married. In her work in Bijnor, Jeffery noted that a woman was blamed for marital breakdown – for not adjusting in her in-laws' home and for bringing shame to her natal family. Her separation was also regarded as affecting the marriage prospects of her unmarried siblings (2001: 18). Jagmati (RB, early 60s, Chamar), saw no point in confiding in her natal kin. "I thought I have to live here, where can I go? For how long can one's natal kin intervene? Yet I did tell them after several years of being

¹⁵ Post-independence legislation has made it possible for a daughter, sister and widow to inherit parental property. Yet women do not usually claim their share for numerous reasons (See Agarwal 1989; Basu 2005).

married when I felt *zyādā pareshānī* [extreme difficulty]" (31 July 2013). Four RBs did not let their parents know about the troubles they had in their *sasurāl* because they felt they would be a burden on their natal kin, who were extremely poor.

RBs pointed out that refuge was available temporarily, but they did/could not exercise the option of leaving violent relationships permanently as that meant remarriage. Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) commented: "If happiness was in my destiny, I would have been happy in this marriage" (18 December 2012). Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) did not want to take the risk of finding herself in an even more unfavourable situation. She said: "What if the second one turned out to be worse than my husband. What would I do then?" (30 January 2013).

Unlike these informants, Kusum's (RB, 47, Chamar) eldest daughter Priti (22, Chamar) did end her marriage to return to live at her *pīhar* in Barampur but she was remarried. During my fieldwork, Priti had been separated from her husband for three years. Kusum said she would be remarried once her court case was settled. In cases of separation and marital breakdown, court intervention was not usually sought and most marital disputes were resolved through caste panchayats and family and caste elders. In this instance, though, a case had been filed in court so that the dowry could be retrieved. For Priti's parents, poor brick-kiln workers, arranging a dowry for her first marriage had been an enormous strain and they were trying to retrieve the dowry so that that they could use it for her second marriage. Priti had stayed with her husband, a drug addict, only for a month following the wedding. She told me about the violence she had experienced and said that she did not want to remarry. Kusum asserted that Priti had no choice but to marry "after we are dead, her brother will not keep her", she added (14 February 2013).

Kusum was aware that Priti had become a source of gossip among other Chamar families and that having her contribute to their household sustenance was regarded as extremely shameful. Also, the pressure to marry her was constant because Kusum's two younger daughters were of marriageable age and a dowry had to be arranged for each of them. Priti was remarried in October 2014, a year after I completed fieldwork. A month later, a relative of Priti's father informed me that Priti had committed suicide while she was visiting her *pīhar* in Barampur. He told me she did

not want to return to her *sasurāl*. I had no further information until a year later (September 2015) when the Jat woman in whose household I lived during my fieldwork, shared the information that she had on the matter. She said that she had heard from Chamar women who worked in her husband's fields that Priti was married to a much older man with grown children. She had refused to return to her *sasurāl* when she came to Barampur to visit and was threatened by her father who said that they were no longer willing to keep her. I thought about the desperation she must have felt at the inescapability of her situation once she realised that she no longer had her parents' support.

Some RB informants explained that they did not leave unhappy marriages or refused remarriage because they would have had to leave their children, especially sons, behind in the *sasurāl*. Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) said: "If I would have left him [son] here – they [in-laws] would beat him every day...what kind of life would he have? My son would curse me. How could I be happy?" (18 December 2012). Kamlesh (RB, late 20s, Kumhar) talked about how her husband treated her differently after children were born.

My husband kept me well for the first year of marriage. He never beat me. He must have thought that if he fights with me, I will not stay, that I will return to my *pīhar* and get remarried. Then after I had my first child, he must have thought, 'where will she go now? She cannot go anywhere, her children are here...beat her as much as you like'.

(17 May 2013)

Even though RBs stressed that refuge was available to them only temporarily, its significance cannot be understated. It may offer women the possibility of negotiating a better situation for themselves, as Urmila's and Sarla's cases demonstrate. Urmila (RB, 32, Jat) had been beaten badly by her husband on one occasion. Her neighbours informed her natal kin and her father and brother came to Barampur the following day and took her to her *pīhar*. She added that she had left her children (two young daughters and an infant son) behind in her *sasurāl* during this period because her husband would have no reason to bring her back if she had not. She explained: "He was having a relationship with another Jat woman...so he had a woman and his mother was there to do the housework. Why would he bring me back?" (29 May

2013). Urmila talked about how her husband made several trips to her *pīhar* to collect her as he needed her to care for their children, but her father refused to send her back. She was sent back to her *sasurāl* after six months, on the condition that her husband would reform his behaviour. Urmila said that while the beating did not stop, it did reduce after her natal family's intervention.

Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) had been married for 32 years. She spent 16 years of her married life at her *pīhar*, but eventually returned to her *sasurāl* with her son. When I first met her in September 2012, she had been in Barampur for 11 years. She talked about the early years she spent at her *sasurāl* as a time of beating, fighting and infidelity. Sarla had succeeded in resisting the attempts by her parents to remarry her and returned to her *sasurāl* when she had the support of an adult son and brothers. When she returned, her brothers negotiated with her in-laws, and her son was given his share of the property. They set up a separate household and she no longer had to live in the extended joint family where she had lived before. For the first eight years after her return to Barampur, Sarla lived in a household with her son. Her husband had begun living with them only three years before I started fieldwork. She told me that it was possible for her to live in her *sasurāl* without her husband for those years only because she had the support of an adult son. This is significant, as Sarla's story would have followed a different trajectory if her only child had been a daughter and not a son. Without a son, it was unlikely that she could have lived independently in a household of her own as a separated woman. The only single-women households in Barampur were those of elderly widows without sons. Sarla's and Urmila's cases demonstrate, as Simon Duncan argues, that women's agency is not "individual, purposive and conscious where action reflects choice" but rather "constrained" and "relational with other individuals and collective agents" (2014:3). The opportunity to exercise agency would not have been available for them but for the support of their natal (especially male) kin.

The significance of natal kin support must not be minimised also because not having kin support can be devastating for a woman as Priti's case (above) and the following illustrate. Not all RBs were equally well placed as far as accessing natal kin support was concerned. Women could not just "walk out" as and when they wished in

situations of marital distress, as some have argued (Grover 2011, see 7.1). Sarla stressed that the only reason she spent so many years in her *pīhar* was because her parents were willing to support her. She added that not all parents keep a daughter who returns to them. She talked about her *devrānī* [HyBW].

My in-laws troubled my *devrānī* like they troubled me. She would go and stay at her *pīhar* for as long as two years while her father and brother were alive. After their death her mother told her not to return because they were two widowed women in that household with no earning member. Her mother told her, ‘there are so many corners in your house in your *sasurāl*, no matter what happens find one corner to die in but do not come back here’.

(12 February 2013)

Similarly, Kamlesh (RB, late 20s, Kumhar) could not rely on her brothers for support. She said:

What is the point of telling your natal kin? They might keep you once and then if you go back again they might not. I went once after a fight in my *sasurāl* and I stayed for 15 days and then my brothers asked me to leave. They are poor and have children of their own. They do not have any earnings. My mother is always ill and they spend a lot on her treatment. My brothers have never come here and said anything to my husband about how he treats me because of *majbūrī* [compulsion]. Where will they keep me? If my father was alive, he would never ask me to leave. He would ask my husband, ‘why do you beat my daughter’?

(17 May 2013)

What emerges from the above is that a woman’s ability to access natal kin support may change over the course of her married life, with financial constraints and the death of fathers being crucial. Kamlesh felt that her husband became more violent once he realised that she had nowhere to go to. If natal kin support is not forthcoming, it places a woman in a particularly vulnerable position, as has also been discussed by Mirza in her work on domestic abuse among Pakistani heritage women in Scotland. She cites the case of an informant for whom the abuse increased once her husband realised that her natal kin had refused to intervene (2015: 134).

The situation of RBs like Kamlesh was similar to CRBs who did not have access to natal kin support. Studies on CRM have drawn attention to the lack of support structures available to CRBs, contrasting their situation with and generalising for all

“local brides” who “can call their natal family to their aid at a moment’s notice” and “walk out” instead of suffering silently (Kukreja and Kumar 2013: 48-49). Such assertions about “local brides” are problematic as has been argued above. In Barampur, distance made seeking refuge (even temporarily) in times of marital distress impossible for CRBs. The literature on inter-provincial marriages in China also highlights how distance results in greater isolation for migrant brides and cuts them off from their kin on whom they can rely for support (Davin 2008; Min and Eades 1995; Schein 2005). Renuka (CRB, 33, Chamar) explained: “I had so many problems but no one came from my *pīhar*. They can come once a year but if something happens tomorrow, how will they come?” (4 December 2012). In her work, Mirza (2015) noted that the main difference between UK-born and Pakistan-born married women in Scotland was distance from natal kin. Pakistan-born women could not seek refuge at their natal homes, unlike the UK-born women whose kin lived in the same city and even neighbourhood. Also, the affines of Pakistan-born women could exercise greater control over limiting their contact with their kin not only due to distance but also immigration status, the cost of phone calls and financial dependency. As natal kin contact was controlled and limited, some women could not confide in their parents about the abuse (2015: 122, 129).

As discussed earlier (see 6.4), domestic violence was an experience shared by RBs and CRBs. Yet their experience of violence was shaped by the differential support available to them, as Sarla’s and Kalawati’s cases demonstrate. Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) had not been in touch with her natal kin for over 20 years. She told me:

My husband would beat me and leave me on the main road and tell me to go away from here. I feel that he beat me so much because he would think, ‘where will she go?’ I do not even have a *pīhar*, so I cannot even go and complain to my brothers. If they were close, even I would have gone and stayed at my *pīhar* for a few days...He [husband] can do whatever he wants, I have nowhere to go to.

(27 July 2013)

Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) described a similar experience she had.

One day he beat me badly...he then dragged me into the car and threw me on the main road of my *pīhar*. My father wanted to shoot him after that but I

begged him not to...My brothers were young. I was worried something might happen to him [father]. I stayed at my *pīhar* for several years after that.

(18 December 2012)

Unlike most RBs, CRBs could not seek the intervention of their natal kin. Like Kalawati, I also heard RBs say: “Where can I go?” yet for the two sets of women it had very different meanings. For RBs, it suggested the inevitability of return to the *sasurāl*. For CRBs, return to the *pīhar* either for refuge or permanently was not an option. Jameela (CRB, 21, Teli) had been told by her parents to adjust in her *sasurāl* no matter what, because they could not afford to get her married again. Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) told me: “After children are born, you have to stay. Your natal family will not keep you. You cannot take your husband’s children and live at your *pīhar*” (15 December 2012). Families who had given daughters in marriage over long-distances due to compulsions of poverty could not provide for or remarry daughters who had returned to live there with their children. For some, like Kanchan (CRB, 21, Chamar) who had married to escape a difficult family situation back home (see 3.10) or like Pushpa (CRB, late 30s, Jat) who had lost contact with their natal families, there was in fact nowhere to go. Pushpa said:

I cannot tell you how unhappy I am. I do not have children. My natal kin are not with me. Who can I tell my problems to? Where can I go? You need money to go. I have no one. No money, no property in my name. What will I do if my husband asks me to leave tomorrow?

(30 July 2013)

Pushpa felt insecure as she had failed to produce a child, especially a male child, which is often a ground for men leaving their wives and remarrying (see 6.3). She reveals how she was economically vulnerable as she was completely dependent on her husband. Unlike most RBs, Pushpa could not call on her natal kin in case of desertion by her husband in future. Also, being childless she could not hope to be supported by a son in future, either.

In contrast to CRBs, a RB’s natal kin also played a significant role if she was widowed. In Barampur, across the five castes, a widowed woman (particularly young widows) could be given in a *bithānā* [levirate] marriage to her (generally) unmarried *jeth* [HeB] or *devar* [HyB] by her natal kin. This is also the practice in other parts of

western UP, Punjab and Haryana (Chowdhry 1994; Kolenda 1982; Pradhan 1961). She could also be remarried into a different family, although this was less common. In Barampur, widows talked about how they had had to remove all the accessories they wore as married women when widowed but continued to wear one glass bangle if their brother was alive, highlighting the significance of the brother-sister relationship. In her work in a UP village, Wadley found a similar custom – married women wore two sets of toe rings on each foot, “one for the husband and one for the brother” (1995: 97). Following the death of either the husband or brother, one set was removed. It was believed that “if the husband’s protection, symbolically and economically, is lost, then a brother’s protection should replace it”. Wadley also discusses the vital role of a widowed woman’s natal kin in safeguarding her interests (1995:107-110).

Whether or not a RB had a son/s affected how likely she was to access support from her natal kin. In Barampur, a widow (who was not remarried) usually remained in her *sasurāl* after her husband’s death and relied on her son’s support. It was considered unacceptable and shameful for a widow to move to live with her married daughter, for reasons outlined in 7.3. If she did not have sons, I was told she had the option of returning to live at her *pīhar*. Studies show that few widows return to live with their brothers or parents permanently (Chen 2000:212-15). Anita (mid-40, Jat, F) had only one child – a daughter. After her husband passed away, she leased out her (agricultural) land to her *jeth* [HeB] and was supporting herself with the money she received from him. During my fieldwork, she was constantly shuttling between her *pīhar* and *sasurāl*. In Barampur, she had been living in a joint household, but talked to me about setting up a household of her own. She said that returning to live in her *pīhar* permanently was not an option for her because of the land, which her (married) daughter would eventually inherit.

Similarly, Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar) was a sonless widow. She had been living alone since her husband passed away, as her three daughters were married. She was landless and worked as a helper in a village school. She told me that she was managing on her own but that once her “hands and feet became *bekār*” [useless] she would not move to her *pīhar* but would live with her oldest daughter in her *sasurāl* as

her daughter's parents-in-law were no longer alive. She added that if she had a son, irrespective of how he treated her, she would have had to remain in her *sasurāl*.

Abha (RB, 25, Chamar) was a young widow. She told me that a *bithānā* marriage was not possible for her as her husband's brothers were all married and she had a dispute with them over her deceased husband's share of the property. She did not want to be married elsewhere because she felt that her second husband may not accept her (four) children. She lived with her elderly widowed *sās* and her unmarried *nanad* [HZ]. She said that after her *sās* passes away and her *nanad* gets married, she would take her children to live at her *pīhar* until her sons grew older and could earn and support her.

Of the five widowed CRB informants, three were living jointly with their married sons. The remaining two, Devanti and Radha (in their early 40s, Chamar) had married daughters and three sons each of ages 10 years and below. During my fieldwork, Devanti eloped with another Chamar from Barampur (see 6.4). Radha attempted to elope with a Jat *randwā* [never-married man], also from the village, but had failed. Following this, she attempted to commit suicide. Over the course of the year that I met Radha, I saw her struggle with extreme poverty, ill health and trying to provide for her three young children. Her situation shed some light on how eloping and arranging a re-marriage for herself may, in her perception, have offered some escape from the hardships of earning a livelihood in the absence of support from an adult son, a husband or natal kin.

There were other kinds of support that RBs could rely on from their kin while CRBs often could not. Munesh (RB, 38, Kumhar), for instance, talked about the financial support her natal family extended to her husband. "The second year of marriage was very difficult. My husband was unemployed, I was ill, then my *sās* fell ill and our cattle died. We did not even have money to buy *ātā* [flour]. My father and brother helped us out" (26 May 2013). Similarly, Khalida (RB, 45, Teli) said that when her elder daughter was diagnosed with cancer, they did not have the money for her treatment. She added: "My in-laws did not even give us a rupee. My father was extremely poor, yet he took a loan to help us" (20 March 2013). By contrast, CRBs generally said that their parents were too poor to offer them any financial support.

Mansi (CRB, 33, Chamar), however, was an exception. She told me that her natal kin sent her money for the surgery she underwent. She added that her natal kin were very poor when she got married, but their financial situation had improved now that her brothers had started earning and so they could help her out.

Kusum (RB, 47, Chamar) explained how her natal kin came to her aid in the absence of help from people in her *sasurāl*. She said that even though it was shameful for a woman to give birth at her *pīhar*, she returned to deliver her son there as she had a troubled relationship with her *jethānī* [HeBW] and *sās* [HM] and hence had no reliable support in her *sasurāl* post-childbirth. Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar) had called her natal kin when she had to have an abortion (due to complications) as her in-laws refused to pay for it. Urmila (RB, 32, Jat) talked about how her husband and *sās* were pressuring her to abort during her third pregnancy for fear that she might give birth to a third girl child. She said that she returned to her *pīhar* and had an ultrasound. She decided to stay at her *pīhar* till her pregnancy was full term and returned to her *sasurāl* to deliver the child as she had learnt that it was a male child.

Sakeena (RB, 43, Teli) said that her younger brother stayed in her *sasurāl* for a year during her husband's illness and was the earning member for their family during that period. Similarly, Abha (RB, 25, Chamar), a widow, talked about how she called her father and *tāū's* son [FeBS] from her *pīhar* to help her with brick-kiln work after her husband passed away. She said that neither her three children (below the age of 10 years) nor her elderly *sās* could work with her in the brick-kiln. She could not seek the help of her *devars* [HyB], as she had a tense relationship with them.

In contrast, CRBs had limited access to the above mentioned kinds of support. Radha (CRB, early 40s, Chamar), also a widow, talked about feeling helpless after her husband passed away. She explained that she had no alternative source of livelihood other than brick-kiln work but she could no longer manage in the kiln as her three sons were below the age of 10 years and both her adult daughters were married. Like Abha (RB), also a widow with young children, Radha had no help from her husband's brothers but unlike her, she had lost contact with her natal kin and could not call on them for support.

What emerges from the above is that, for CRBs, distance made the possibility of seeking refuge in situations of marital stress impossible and compulsions of poverty made return permanently difficult. Whilst RBs were generally better placed in this regard, the ability to access support from natal kin varied among RBs as it changed over the course of their married lives. Some RBs, like CRBs, then found themselves without any support.

Conclusion

In discussing women's contact with their natal kin, I show that distance and the cost of travel made frequent visits difficult for CRBs. Yet most RBs also did not make frequent visits to the *pīhar* after the first or early years of marriage. For RBs, visits depended on a range of factors, with proximity to their natal home not the only one. Nevertheless, most RBs were better placed than the CRBs who had either lost contact with their kin over the years and no longer visited, or who had had no contact at all since they got married. A visit to the *pīhar* aided the process of adjustment for RBs in the early years and at later stages of their married lives offered them some respite from work. While this (length and frequency of visits) varied among RBs, this was not available to CRBs at all.

In RM, gift-giving was significant not only in sustaining relations between a married woman and her natal kin but additionally served to maintain relations between her natal and affinal kin. The gifts that women received depended on several factors: the economic status of her natal family, her parents being alive, years of marriage and the number of sisters she had. While CRBs did not receive child-birth gifts or gifts on festive occasions, gift-giving was not completely absent for some CRBs. They received gifts from their kin when they visited their native states. While RBs and CRBs alike were taunted for not bringing enough, RBs were more vulnerable than CRBs as demands for gifts and goods continued to be made on the natal kin of RBs.

Thus, within the context of their day-to-day lives RBs did not have contact with their natal kin any more than CRBs did, but natal kin contact was highly significant if we focus on the reasons and situations in which women called on their kin for support. In contexts such as this, where women are not economically independent and a life

outside of marriage is not an option for them, the support that a married woman has from her natal kin alone provides her with an option to leave, even if only temporarily. This may enable her either to negotiate a better situation for herself, or simply to recuperate and return to her marriage. Knowing that they could call on their natal kin provided RBs assurance and a greater sense of (potential) rescue, particularly in situations of marital distress and violence. The significance of natal kin support for a married woman must, thus, not be understated.

In this regard, most RBs were better placed than CRBs, who could neither seek the intervention of their natal kin nor refuge at their natal homes in situations of marital crisis or widowhood. Yet not all RBs were favourably placed as far as accessing natal kin support and distance was not the determining factor in the opportunities they had to draw on support. Some RBs were prevented from seeking natal kin support by ideologies of honour and shame, the awareness that parents were too poor to offer support and that the only alternative to leaving permanently was remarriage and leaving children behind. The support available to a woman may also change over the course of her married life. Poverty and the absence of male kin, especially fathers, left some RBs without support. For such RBs, like CRBs, as far as natal kin support was concerned, their kin were absent. The absence of natal kin support placed women in a particularly vulnerable situation.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE CROSS-REGIONAL BRIDE

...the social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds.

(Bourdieu 1984:471)

Introduction

In previous chapters, I have discussed the similarities and differences in RBs and CRBs experiences of everyday married life. In this chapter, I focus on issues specific to CRM. I begin by exploring how inter-caste CRMs are rationalised in a context otherwise marked by “rigidity” with respect to marriage norms. I then focus on whether CRBs feel a sense of belonging to and are accepted as insiders into the communities in which they marry. I delineate specific kinds of discrimination against CRBs from their husband’s relatives and others in the village that are manifested in verbal abuse, derogatory remarks about skin colour and refusals to accept food or marry the children of CRBs. I apply Bourdieu’s framework on how class distinctions are sustained to an understanding of caste. He notes how each “class condition” is defined not only by its “intrinsic properties” but also by the “relational properties” derived from its position within the system of class conditions – also a system of differences or differential positions, i.e., by everything that distinguishes it from what it is not and especially from everything to which it is opposed. Social identity, he asserts, is defined and asserted through difference (1984: 172). He notes how the dominant classes “...have to work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination.” (1977: 190). I, thus, focus on how, a “sense of one’s place” and caste distinctions are enacted and maintained through “cultural products”, “language”, “judgements” inscribed in institutions that constantly arise in the “meetings and interactions of everyday life” (1984: 471).

This chapter, discusses not only issues related to the incorporation and acceptance of CRBs but explores the implications of the CR status of brides for the next generation by focusing on the caste status and marriage of children of inter-caste CR unions, an aspect that has not been researched in any detail by existing studies on CRM. I supplement the accounts of CRBs with others – their husbands’ relatives, neighbours, and village and caste members. I use rumour, gossip and informal conversations with

a range of informants as sources of information to highlight the discourse surrounding CRM that provides insights into the extent and quality of their incorporation and acceptance.

8.1. An “Endogamy Paradox”? Explaining Inter-Caste CRM

In Barampur, as in the rest of north India, caste endogamous marriage was the norm and central to the reproduction of caste with conformity enforced often through the use of violence rationalised as a means to redeem *izzat* [honour]. Chakravarti explains that the use of “honour” to legitimise violence “is about maintaining the structures of ‘social’ power”. This, she argues, is “a complex formation to maintain control over land, status, and women’s sexuality intact. Social power then is located at the intersection of material power or class, status-based power or caste, and power over women or patriarchy as they work together” (2003: 150).

Alliances that evoke the most violent response are those between Dalits and non-Dalits, particularly those involving upper caste women and Dalit men. Like the upper castes, Dalit castes are also opposed to inter-caste marriage (Chowdhry 2007; Chakravarti 2005). Ethnographic studies note a “rigid endogamy” among Dalit castes (Grover 2011: 117) as well as a resistance to Dalits marrying non-Dalits (Dhanda 2012). Given norms of *gotrā* [clan], village and territorial exogamy, violence follows marriages/elopements that transgress not only boundaries of caste but also those that are intra-village/*gotrā*. Rampal (87, Jat, M) told me about an intra-village elopement in the early 1990s.

The faces of the fathers of the couple were blackened and they were made to sit on donkeys and taken around the village [common means of public shaming]. The girl was later brought back and married to someone else. Now if couples elope, they are not harmed as long as they do not return to the village

(29 July 2013)

Lakshmi (CRB, late 40s, Kumhar) told me about an inter-religious relationship which ended in 2011 with the woman (18, Kumhar) committing “suicide” after her relationship with her Muslim neighbour became known to her parents. Lakshmi said that it was rumoured that this was not a case of suicide but the woman’s father had

forced her to consume poison. Babli (19, Chamar, F) told me about a similar case among the Chamars in 2009 involving a young woman (early 20s) who had a relationship with a Chamar man (also in his 20s) from Delhi. Babli said that her parents explained her death as resulting from an illness even though it was “known” to everyone in the village that she had been murdered by her father. During my fieldwork, a young woman (early 20s, Jat) employed in the UP Police and posted in Aligarh had a “court marriage” [legal/registered marriage] with a Muslim man from Aligarh. Jat informants said that her (natal) family had severed ties with her and threatened her with consequences if she returned.

As these cases suggest, breaches in marriage norms were not tolerated and were punished with violence. During my fieldwork, I heard several rumours about pre-marital (inter-caste) relationships within the village or between young men and women in Barampur and the neighbouring villages, but these never culminated in marriage. Yet CRMs that contravene caste and at times religious boundaries had been taking place in Barampur since at least the early 1960s. Writing on Haryana, Abraham described “honour” killings, on the one hand, and CRM, on the other, as an “endogamy paradox” (2014: 61). She argues that in CRM, brides are imported from outside the locality so their caste identity remains “unknown and vague” and it does not disturb local power equations. She states that the assertion of endogamy is not about “the purity of blood or the mixing of castes *per se*, but about mixing with groups in known hierarchical relationships” (2014: 63). Kaur explains:

What possibly explains the *differential acceptability* [my emphasis] is that inter-caste marriage within a village or between neighbouring villages impacts the local standing of families much more than when one spouse is non-local. The ‘behaviour’ of local women has consequences for both their natal and marital families. The ‘foreign’ women, whose origins are somewhat suspect, are measured with a different rod; they are tolerated as long as they try to conform sufficiently to local norms.

(2004: 2602)

Mishra (2013) in her work on CRM in Haryana also explains the “differential acceptance” of such marriages in terms of necessity. Further, like Kaur (2004), she argues that such marriages neither affect the local caste hierarchy nor the prestige of the husband’s family as the natal kin of the bride are in a distant region. Also, the

caste background of the bride can be concealed without difficulty, as it is known only to those who accompanied the groom to the bride's native state for the wedding. Mishra argues that the fact that the brides belong to other castes is "not a contentious issue in itself" and that "Haryanvi society has *accepted* [my emphasis] this as a normal phenomenon" (2013: 74).

In Barampur, informants rationalised in different ways how men were permitted to bring brides of unknown caste status from different regions whilst inter-caste RMs were not tolerated. Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar) explained that CRMs were not always tolerated. Prior to Hemlata's (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) arrival in the early 1970s, who Jagbiri said was the first CRB among the Kumhars, a CRM would result in outcasting – "*huqqā pānī bandh*" [caste members would refuse to share the *huqqā* (smoking pipe) or accept water from them].¹⁶ She explained that *majbūrī* [necessity] made men go out to bring wives and as more and more CRBs started coming in, CRMs started becoming "acceptable". Brijpal (55, Kumhar, M), Kalawati's (CRB, 40, Kumhar) husband, said that when a bride comes *bāhar se* [from outside/another state] and belongs to a lower caste, it is hidden. His own attempt to conceal his wife's caste became evident when I spoke to Kalawati. Brijpal said that his wife's father's caste was Thakur/Rajput [an upper caste]. However, Kalawati told me:

When I came here, I had to lie and tell others that even I am Kumhar. They do not know here what the Karamkar caste is. Karamkars are Lohars. Here Lohars are Muslims but in Assam they are Hindus. Since I have been here, I have been saying that my caste is Kumhar. You have to hide your caste; there is nothing you can do.

(2 February 2013)

Like Kalawati, other CRBs talked about being told by their husbands and in-laws not to reveal their caste to others or that they should say that they either belonged to their husband's caste or to a higher caste. Lakshmi (CRB, late 40s, Kumhar), for instance, told me that her father's caste was Mahishya and she added that Jat was only a different name for the same caste in Bengal. She did not say that it was a different name for Kumhar [her husband's caste] but rather Jat, the dominant caste in

¹⁶ Members of a caste share the *huqqā* among themselves and it serves as a signifier of equality and unity among them.

Barampur. Six of the nine CRBs married to Chamar men said that they belonged to non-Dalit castes prior to their marriage in Barampur and stressed that they had been deceived by the go-between about their husbands' caste. Renuka (CRB, 33, Chamar), for instance, said that her father's caste was (Hindu) *Nāī* [barber] and her family was told that her husband also belonged to the same caste. "This is a *chōttī jātī*" [low caste], she added (4 December 2012). There was no way to establish if CRBs did in fact belong to the castes that they said they did.

While attempts were made to pass off CRBs as belonging to their husbands' or to a higher caste, it was rumoured that they belonged to different castes. Kavita (RB, 41, Jat, F) said: "You can tell that the caste of these women is different because everyone here knows *Jat kāhā hai Bengal mein* [where are there Jats in Bengal]? Nobody asks these women what their caste is, because when they are asked they say they are Sonar or Brahmin or Rajput [upper castes]" (14 August 2013). Kavita suggests not only that these women could possibly not belong to higher castes but she alludes also to the commonly held assumption in Barampur that all CRBs belonged to *nīchī jātīs* [lower/Dalit castes]. Yet when they first came to Barampur, seven CRBs were questioned by RBs about their fathers' castes. Chhaya (CRB, 55, Kumhar) told me that in the early years those from her husband's *kunbā* [extended family] called her "*Chamārī*" [a Chamar woman]. These were ways to put CRBs down. Jagmati (RB, early 60s, Chamar) said:

Maya [CRB, mid 40s, Chamar] is a Muslim Teli from Bengal and there is another woman here Sheela [CRB, early 40s, Chamar] and she tells everyone her natal kin are Brahmin [upper caste] but she is actually the daughter of a Chuhra [Dalit]. You find out when their natal families come to visit them here. When Maya first came here no one knew that she was Muslim. When it became known, the villagers started saying, 'look what has happened, a Teli is married to a Chamar'.

(1 August 2013)

Jagmati, a Dalit herself, asserted her superior status by saying that these CRBs were Muslim or Chuhra [Chamars regard Chuhras or Valmiki to be lower than themselves in the hierarchy of Dalit castes]. Ashok (39, Jat, M) explained why CRMs were permitted despite the unknown or assumed lower caste status of CRBs:

These women are *dūr kī* [from far away] so it is easier to keep quiet because we know that their caste is different but we cannot say anything for certain. The thinking here is, *majbūrī thī* [it was out of compulsion] and at least he managed to get married and will have a family of his own.

(1 December 2012)

Ashok suggests, as also did other informants, that the caste of a woman in an inter-caste RM would become known to everyone. In CRM, however, owing to distance and regional differences, the myth of the woman belonging to the same or a higher caste was easier to maintain. In conversations about the differential caste status, informants remarked that the caste of CRBs was insignificant because “a woman has no caste of her own”, that after marriage she becomes a member of her husband’s caste group. Mahipal (68, Jat, M) told me: “The Jat community is like the river Ganges: whoever falls into it also becomes Jat” (27 May 2013). A similar saying: “The Jat is like an ocean, whichever river falls into this ocean loses its identity and becomes the ocean itself” was used to rationalise inter-caste marriages during the colonial period (Chowdhry 2007: 212). The same explanation, however, was not advanced for inter-caste RM.

My findings resonate with the arguments of scholars who point to a lack of resistance to CRMs due to *majbūrī* – the felt necessity or compulsion to marry. Moreover, these marriages do not disturb local power or status hierarchies within the village. Nevertheless, I do not agree with Mishra’s contention that CRMs have been accepted as a “normal phenomenon” and their caste status is “not a contentious issue in itself” (2013: 74). In the following sections, I show that whilst the CRB’s differential caste status is overlooked when the marriage is negotiated, her CR origins and specifically her supposed lower caste status is used within day-to-day interaction to mark difference and assert (superior) status by those in the marital village. There is *tolerance* but not *acceptance* of CRM.

8.2. Belonging

For CRBs, marriage meant not only movement from *pīhar* [natal home] to *sasurāl* [in-laws’/marital home] but additionally learning a new language and adopting the dress, food habits and way of life of their marital village in order to be accepted and

incorporated as insiders (see 5.1). For some CRBs, the process also entailed a name change that served either to conceal their pre-marital Muslim identity or to provide them with a new one more suited to the community into which they married. Once “re-socialised”, were CRBs gradually incorporated into their marital families and communities? In her work in Haryana, Chowdhry argues that CRBs fail to be incorporated and they occupy an “unrecognisable and indefinable status” in *Haryānvī* society (2005: 5195). Similarly, Kukreja and Kumar maintain that CRBs are defined as the “other”, as lower castes and inferior (2013: 31).

Some others, however, argue that CRBs are gradually incorporated and accepted as wives and mothers (Kaur 2004, 2012; Mishra 2013). They live “monogamously in long-lasting marriages and give birth to several children” (Blanchet 2008: 177). Like these scholars, I also made a similar argument, suggesting that recognition as wives and mothers implied acceptance, in my earlier work on CRM in a village in Badaun district of UP (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011). Further, I interpreted the marriage of children of CRBs in their father’s caste as indicating incorporation of brides into caste and village communities. That study was based on short-term fieldwork and the conclusions were drawn from interviews only with CRBs and their husbands that left some questions unaddressed.

In Barampur as well, informants recognised CRBs as and spoke about them as wives – *bahū* [SW], *awrat* or *gharwālī* [wife] – even in cases where a ritual wedding was known not to have taken place (see 4.3). CRBs participated in religious ceremonies as wives and attended weddings in their husbands’ families and caste community. Their names were on ration and election cards that served as proof of their marital status. The children born of these marriages were regarded as legitimate and male children inherited their fathers’ property, as did the sons of RBs. The question of incorporation and acceptance, however, is more complex, as I discuss in the following pages.

In her work in a Rajasthan village, Palriwala (2001) noted that it was rare for a woman to lose entirely her sense of belonging to her natal home. Nevertheless, with life-cycle changes – as mothers of sons and as senior women – women became increasingly incorporated into their marital homes. In Barampur, when I questioned

RBs about what they considered as their home *pīhar* or *sasurāl*, the responses varied from: after marriage a woman's home is her *sasurāl*, to the *sasurāl* feels like home once children were born, to having to live and die in the *sasurāl* yet for a woman only her *pīhar* is home, to a woman never completely belonging either to her *pīhar* or her *sasurāl*.

Five CRBs, like RBs, said that they felt that their *sasurāl* in Barampur was home: “where your parents give you in marriage, that is home”, they explained. Others, like Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar), however, felt differently. She had been in Barampur since the late 1980s. She told me:

This is my home and yet it is not. One's home is where one is born even though I have to live and die here now. My parents got me married and I came to *pardesh* [foreign land]... now I will have to accept this as my home. This is *pardesh* even now, not *apnā desh* [one's own country]. If someone asks me, where are you from? I will say I am from Silchar [Assam]. I came here after marriage, but my home is there. Even for my married daughter, her home is here in Barampur.

(11 February 2013)

Kalawati suggests that a woman's home will always be her natal home. This was an opinion that some RBs, like Kusum, shared (RB, 47, Chamar): “I am married here, but if you ask me where am I from, I will say *wāhā kī*” [from there – she named her natal village] (25 February 2013). Unlike Kusum, however, Kalawati also makes a distinction between one's own and a foreign land – Barampur was *pardesh*. Having adapted to the way of life in *pardesh*, divesting themselves of all markers of a pre-marital (regional) identity, did CRBs feel a sense of belonging in the community into which they married? Jaya (CRB, 45, Jat), who had been in Barampur since the mid-1980s, said:

Here people can look at me once and tell that I am *bāhar kī* [from outside]. Everyone knows that I am not a UP woman. Even a cloth-seller who comes to the house will ask me, ‘where are you from? You are not *yāhā kī*’ [from here]. I still think of myself as a Bengali woman. How can I think of myself as a UP *wālī* [belonging to UP] when no one here accepts this?

(13 July 2013)

Like some other CRBs, Jaya pointed out that they could not claim to belong to UP as they looked different from RBs. CRBs added that apart from appearance, they could be identified as *bāhar kī* even more so because of language as their accent was different. They talked about how they had learnt the local language, but as soon as they started speaking they were questioned about where they came from and told that they did not speak “*yāhā kī bhāshā*” [the language of “here”, i.e., Barampur]. Lakshmi (CRB, late 40s, Kumhar) had been in Barampur since the early 1980s. She told me that at times she spoke a few Bengali words while speaking Hindi and was taunted for not letting go of her native language. To me, what was striking about her, unlike other CRB from Bengal, was her Bengali accent. People in the village could list out to me the CRBs married within their caste without any difficulty. They did not distinguish between whether CRBs were from Maharashtra, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar or Assam. For them, they were all *bāhar kī* [from outside], *dūr kī* [from far away], *Bihārī* [from Bihar] or *pūrab se* [easterner].

8.3. Discrimination

CRBs were given recognition within families and the village as wives, daughters-in-law and mothers, yet their sense of belonging was negotiated by reminders that their language, appearance and caste status were different. In this section, I focus on three ways in which villagers marked difference: verbal abuse (name-calling), derogatory remarks about skin colour, and through interactions involving food.

8.3.1. Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse was an experience common to RBs and CRBs, but for CRBs, this was linked to their CR origins. RBs were sometimes mocked by their in-laws for not bringing enough dowry or gifts following marriage (see 2.4.1 and 7.3). For some like Koyal (RB, 16, Chamar), being verbally abused by those in her *sasurāl* was an everyday experience for reasons she could not comprehend.

My *sās* [HM] and *sūsar* [HF] give me *gālīs* [verbal abuse] all the time. My *sās* tells my husband, ‘why are you running after this *randī*’ [whore]? They say that I have a *yār* [lover]. I have been having trouble conceiving a child so my *nanad* [HZ] tells me that I am a *hijrā* [eunuch] because I cannot even

have children. My *sūsar* tells me, ‘we can get Sanjay [husband] married a hundred times’.

(5 April 2013)

Muneera (RB, 32, Lohar), like Koyal, talked about being mocked and called *bānjh* [barren] by her *sās* and *nanads* when she faced difficulties in conceiving a child.

Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) shared her experience:

My husband’s *chāchī* [FyBW] would say, ‘she is a *bāndhī* [slave/servant]. If we send her to her *pīhar*, then who will do the work?’ The day my son was born there was no one with me. When I started having pains, I told her to call the *dāī* [midwife]. She said to me: ‘When a *kuttiyā* [bitch] gives birth, who comes to help her, she gives birth on her own’.

(28 January 2013)

CRBs, however, were verbally abused in ways that served to remind them of where they came from and/or that a payment had been made for them. In her study of Bangladeshi wives in eastern UP, Blanchet (2008) found that the term “*kharīdān awrat*” [purchased wife] was used for CRBs (2008: 167). Similarly, Jeffery and Jeffery in their study in Bijnor district noted that “*bahū mol lenā*” was used to mean “taking a bride for a price” (1996: 231). In Barampur, CRBs talked about being referred to or called *pūrābnī* [from the east], *Bihārī* [from Bihar] or *mol kī* [bought wife]. Nine of the nineteen CRBs interviewed said that none of this had ever been said to them to their face but they were aware that they were referred to in this way when people in the village talked amongst themselves. The remaining ten CRBs said that whenever there was a fight with a RB, they were verbally abused in this way. Pushpa had been married for 18 years and was childless. Like Muneera (RB), she told me that she had been called *bānjh* [barren] by her husband’s relatives but also that they would remark: “*Bihāran kā bachā bhī nahī hūā*” [the woman from Bihar could not even have a child] (30 July 2013). Sheela (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) expressed her annoyance to me:

The villagers call us *pūrābnī* irrespective of where we are from. I feel really angry and tell them that I am not even from *pūrab* [east]. I am from Maharashtra [in the west]. Irrespective of how old I get, I will always be a *pūrābnī*. Sometimes in the middle of a fight, women will say, ‘why are you talking so much, after all *tuh mol ā rahī hai*’ [you have come for a price].

Once during a fight, even my own *bahū* [SW/daughter-in-law] said this to me.

(30 September 2012)

Likewise, Jeeti (73, Chamar, F) told me: “My *bahū* [SW] calls me *pūrabnī*. I am not the only one here. She does not give me food. She mocks me, saying that I am from Bihar and I do not know about the *rītī rivāj* [rituals and customs] here” (5 December 2012). Some RBs also talked about their troubled relationships with their *bahūs*. The *bahū*’s unwillingness to give them food was a common complaint. They had not, however, been insulted by their *bahūs* in the way that these CRBs had. Jeeti (CRB) had come to Barampur as the wife of a Chamar in the early 1960s. When I asked her neighbour, an elderly Chamar RB, about Jeeti, “she is a *pūrabnī*” is the first thing she told me. Even 50 years of living in Barampur had not sufficed for others to stop identifying her as being from elsewhere.

On one occasion, I was surprised when I went to talk to Faiza (CRB, late 40s, Lohar). As I was leaving, her 12 year old daughter commented: “My mother has no sense. It is because she is *Bihārī*” (1 April 2013). I met some of Faiza’s husband’s relatives. They referred to Faiza as “*Bihāro*”, something her daughter probably heard from them or others and repeated. Unlike Faiza’s daughter, who probably did not comprehend the import of such terms, the children of the other CRBs I spoke to seemed very conscious of their mother’s CR status. When I went to talk to Lakshmi (CRB, late 40s, Kumhar), the first question that her son Pramod (21, Kumhar, M) asked me was if I was aware that his mother was from “Bangla-desh”.¹⁷ In the course of the conversation, he told me that he felt that women like his mother were not given the same *sammān* [respect] as RBs were. He added: “No one in the family ever treated my mother differently, but outsiders do. They think *galat* [wrong] things about Bengal. They say that people there are *bhūkhe* [hungry], *nange* [naked] and *anpadh*” [illiterate] (2 April 2013). In other words, the regions where CRBs originated from were associated with backwardness in people’s perception.

¹⁷ All the Bengali brides among the Kumhars belong to Midnapore district that in 2002 was divided into West and East Medinipur. They, however, said that they were from Bangla-desh. They explained: “The land where the Bangla language is spoken”, not meaning the country but the “land” as they explained.

My facilitator, Satender (55, Chamar, M) would say, “*Bihār side kī*” when talking about CRBs. He explained: “If she is from that side, then we will have to say that she is from there. Most people do not know Jharkhand but Bihar is known to everyone” (25 February 2013).¹⁸ While Satender suggested that speaking of CRBs in this way did not involve any prejudice, two CRBs told me that when they were called “*Bangālan*” or “*Bihāran*” they felt, “*gālī de rahe hai*” [they are verbally abusing us]. Pusha (CRB, late 30s, Jat) said: “My *sās* would call me *Bihāran* whenever the work was not done. It was her way of *gālī dēnā*” [verbally abusing] (30 July 2013).

When Devanti (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) eloped with a Chamar *randwā* [never-married man] from Barampur, Satender linked it to her CR status. He suggested that a RB would have *sharm* [shame] and she would consider the *izzat* [honour] of her family instead of running away in contrast to a CRB. When I brought up the case of the Lohar RB from Barampur who had eloped with a Jat *randwā*, he brushed it aside as an exceptional case. Likewise, Kavita (41, Jat, F) an *anganwādī* [government appointed health worker] commented on Devanti: “Her youngest son was at the *anganwādī* when she ran away. She does not care about her children. She left them and ran away. This is how *these Bihārī women* [my emphasis] are” (15 August 2013).

Some other CRBs talked about being reminded that they were “bought”. Pushpa (CRB, late 30s, Jat) said that her husband often mocked her by saying that her *jījā* [ZH], the go-between for her marriage, “*ne bech dīyā*” [sold her]. Similarly, Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat) talked about how her *devar* [HyB] often repeated to her that anyone could “buy a bride in exchange for a bottle of alcohol” in Bengal (her native state) (12 December 2012).

Five CRBs, however, said that no one had ever discriminated against them since they first came to Barampur. Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar) told me:

When I go to Jat households, they do not let me leave without giving me a cup of tea. Everyone speaks to me in the village. My *sūsar* [father-in-law] was a very nice man. He treated me like his daughter. When I first came here, he distributed sweets to everyone and told them, ‘a *bahū* [daughter-in-law]

¹⁸ Jharkhand was formerly part of Bihar and was carved out as a separate state in 2000.

has come in our house, go and see her'. Lots of people came to see me. They gave me ₹10-20 for *mūh dikhāī* [face showing]. I had three purses full of money. No one said anything about me being *bāhar kī* [from outside]. They still do not say this.

(11 February 2013)

But Kalawati was unaware of how people talked about her behind her back. I was introduced to her by the Jat man on whose fields she worked as a labourer. He referred to her as “a *Bangālan* among the Kumhars”.

Some RBs, like Jagbiri (71, Kumhar), though felt that there was no difference between her and CRBs and that the latter were given the same respect. She added: “When they have come in marriage with your own *devars* [HyB], then how can you discriminate?” (28 February 2013). Similarly, Urmila (RB, 32, Jat) talked about how she considered Varsha (CRB, 28, Jat), married in her husband’s *kunbā* [extended family], to be a younger sister. Varsha and Urmila met every Tuesday as they kept a [religious] fast and visited the village temple together. Not all RBs, however, felt as Jagbiri and Urmila did.

8.3.2. Skin Colour

Savita (CRB, late 20s, Jat), like Kalawati, told me that no one had discriminated against her since she came to Barampur in 2007. Her neighbour Kajri (RB, 35, Jat) said the following about Savita, however:

She is not beautiful at all. *Bihārī* women are *kālī* [literally black, but used to describe dark skin]. He [her husband] should have chosen a better woman; a woman who looked nice standing beside him. She looks like a Chamar woman. Even when she bathes, it makes no difference. Marriage should be within the caste. Only a Jat is fit for a Jat.

(19 November 2012)

In the above, Kajri makes a reference to Savita’s skin colour, but also implies that she not only belonged to a different caste but was of a lower caste and unclean. I also talked to Savita’s father-in-law the first time I went to their home. I asked him if I could meet her. He replied saying, “she is inside”. He added, “*sāwlī hai*”. In north India, *sāwlī* is generally used to mean of wheatish complexion. In Barampur, however, it was used to describe dark skin in contrast to *bhūrī* used for light skin. He

thought I did not understand, so he repeated in English, “she is black” (19 November 2012). When I asked a Jat *anganwāḍī* worker about CRBs among the Jats she told me: “You will be able to identify them without any difficulty: they look like a *kālā kuttā*” [black dog] (17 October 2012). Sudeshna (RB, 23, Kumhar) the *bahū* [SW] of a CRB told me: “I feel bad when people from my natal village tell me that my husband is so *kālā*. When they see him, they ask me if my *sās* is from West Bengal. I tell them she is from Meerut [neighbouring district] not West Bengal” (1 August 2013). This highlights how an immediate association was made between dark skin and CRBs. For these CRBs, the above remarks had not been made in their presence, but five other CRBs had been derided to their face for allegedly having dark skin by their husband’s relatives or other women in the village.

In their study of CRM in Haryana, Kukreja and Kumar (2013) found concerns that “dark-skinned women” would dilute the “racial attributes” of the *Haryanvis*. They use “colourism” and “internal racism” to explain the discrimination that CRBs face. They argue that “comparisons between Haryanvis as fair, aesthetically beautiful and civilisationally superior and the dark-skinned cross-region brides as ugly, primitive in behaviour and dull in intelligence are not uncommon” (2013: 43-44). Mishra, also writing on CRM in Haryana, in response to Kukreja and Kumar’s work argues that “issues of racism and colourism may hold salience in the western context but not so much in India” (2013: 74). She does not explain why the language of colourism cannot be used in the Indian context when she herself acknowledges that “in India, consideration of skin colour is an integral part of the process of matchmaking” (2013: 74). With regard to colourism, three points need to be highlighted.

First, in India, colour consciousness becomes evident in the matchmaking process as light/fair skin is highly desirable.¹⁹ Also, this is gendered as it is a much more significant consideration for women (who must be fair) than men, as several studies on matrimonial advertisements have also noted (cf. Chauhan 2007; Jha and Adelman 2009; Kaur and Dhanda 2014). Studies also show that skin colour remains a preoccupation for Indians and the Indian diaspora (around the world) as they constitute the largest market for skin lighteners, with the majority of consumers being

¹⁹ In South Asia, fair instead of white is used to describe light skin.

women between the ages of 16-35 (Glenn 2008: 289). During the course of my fieldwork, I often heard women make remarks about potential or new RBs not being satisfactory or *sundar* [beautiful] because they were *sāwlī* [dark-skinned] and not *bhūrī* [light skinned].

Second, the literature on caste has drawn attention to racially-based theories of caste that, for instance, identify lower castes with “black” skin and upper caste Brahmins with “white” skin (Kumar 2005: 526). Such theories have been questioned as noted by scholars (cf. Deshpande 2002; Gorringer and Rafanell 2007), yet in Barampur, some castes placed a higher premium on lighter skin than others and associations were drawn between caste and colour. Lower caste women were spoken of as having darker skin hence the comparison that Kajri, RB (above) makes between Savita (CRB) and Chamar women. When I started fieldwork and enquiries were made about what caste I belonged to, I was told by a Jat (male) informant that I did not “look like a Chamar women” because I was *bhūrī*. In this context, Sarla (RB, 47, Jat) told me: “Usually Chamars are very *kālā* but you will notice that some Chamars have lighter skin than others. These are children of Chamar women and Jat men” (12 August 2013). The “darker skin” of CRBs contributed to the assumption that they all belonged to lower castes. *Third*, what is significant is that informants made references to the skin colour of CRBs. They did not say that CRBs looked different because they had different facial features which most brides, particularly from Assam and West Bengal did, they adopted the idiom of colour instead, that they were familiar with, to accentuate difference.

8.3.3. Food

Sheela (CRB, mid-40s, Chamar) said: “When I first came here, my *nanad* [HZ] would say, ‘I will not accept food cooked by this *kālī* [black] woman’. My *jethānī* [HeBW, a RB] was also *kālī* but my *nanad* accepted food cooked by her. This is because I am from *pūrab* [east]” (18 December 2012). Sheela points out that her dark skin, unlike her *jethānī*’s, was an issue because of her CR origins. What is implied was that being from *pūrab* meant belonging to a different/unknown caste and hence the refusal to accept food. Food transactions – how food is prepared, served, consumed and who it is shared with - carry implications for the purity of the caste.

Dumont writes: “Food corresponds to relations outside the caste as well as to relations within it” (1980: 142). Commensal relations are expressed through the taking of food – *kaccā* [cooked in water] or *pakkā* [cooked in oil], taking water from common receptacles and sharing the *huqqā* [smoking pipe] (Mayer 1960).

As the task of food preparation falls on women, acceptance of food cooked by a woman in an inter-caste marriage involves “complex judgements regarding the difference in the ritual quality of foods in terms of their purity and vulnerability to pollution” (Dube 2003: 230). The refusal to accept food denotes superiority of caste rather than equality (Dumont 1980; Mayer 1960). In the course of fieldwork, questions were constantly raised about my caste status, as I stayed at a Jat household but accepted food at Chamar households. Some Chamar informants were perplexed and they pointed out to me that they did not accept food in Valmiki/Chuhra (Dalit but considered lower in ranking than Chamars) households, although I had never been present when this had happened.

In their work on CRM in Haryana and Rajasthan, Kukreja and Kumar noted that “local brides” did not allow CRBs to enter the kitchen and did not eat food cooked by them. CRBs had to establish separate kitchens (2013: 33). In her study in Haryana, however, Mishra states that she found only one case of discrimination based on caste and argues that it is only in a very small number of cases that CRBs face caste-based discrimination (2013: 75). In the following pages, I will not make an argument like Kukreja and Kumar that generalises the experience for all brides. Equally, I do not, like Mishra, argue that caste-based discrimination takes place only in exceptional cases. At the same time, it is essential to point out that it is difficult to disentangle caste-based from other forms of discrimination. Kavita (41, Jat, F) distinguished between when CRBs first started arriving in Barampur and the recent years. She told me:

Earlier it was in exceptional cases that a Jat man brought a woman *bāhar se* [from outside]. People would go to see the woman – ‘*Bihāran ayi*’ [a *Bihārī* woman has come]. They would not accept food at the homes of such woman but this is not the case now. Now you can find so many here. Also, in the past all Jats were vegetarian but now they have started eating eggs and meat.

(15 August 2013)

Kavita suggests that an increase in number of CRBs over the years was accompanied by relaxation with regard to food practices. Yet as Sudeshna (23, Kumhar, F), the daughter-in-law of a CRB points out, some people in the village continued to discriminate against CRBs.

People differentiate with women who come *bāhar se* because in their native states they used to eat eggs and fish. When I got married, my *taū* [FeB] and *chāchā* [FyB] would say, ‘your *sās is ūdhar kī* [from there] she will eat fish and rice everyday’. Here [in Barampur] we do not even touch eggs. For this reason, I do not tell anyone that she is *bāhar kī*. I do not feel bad that my *sās* is from there. I even eat food cooked by her. She has been here for so many years yet there are some people who do not accept food from women like her because they think it is not clean

(1 August 2013)

Thus, despite claims that there was no discrimination against CRBs, attempts to mark difference became evident in transactions involving food. This is clear in the words of Rampal (87, Jat, M): “We do not treat a woman who comes *bāhar se* differently, but we do not accept food cooked by her. If she comes and gives us some food we will take it from her and later give it to the cattle to eat” (29 July 2013).

Both Kavita and Sudeshna link the refusal to accept food with vegetarianism. Dumont has drawn attention to the association between vegetarianism and purity and a meat diet and impurity (1980: 56). In some Jat households male members had taken to consuming non-vegetarian food and people explained this primarily in terms of out-migration for work. However, most Jats and all Kumhars in Barampur, unlike Chamars and Muslims, were vegetarian. In her interviews with family members of CRBs from Kerala, who were married in Haryana, Abraham found that men sought women of “good castes” for marriage. In several cases, the mothers of the grooms were told that the women were not meat-eaters. This and the relatively lighter skin of the women were regarded as markers of them belonging to a “good caste” (2014: 63).

Further, western UP has had a history of in-migration of *Bihārī* labourers who are employed by Jat farmers. During my fieldwork, I heard various accounts that stereotyped migrants from Bihar. “They eat anything, even rats”, was one of them. This may also have contributed to the prejudice against CRBs who in local perception were “*Bihārī*” or “from the side of Bihar”. I heard Jat informants pass

similar remarks about Chamars: “They eat anything – not only *murgā* [chicken] but also *sūar* [pig] and *gāī* [cow]”. In Barampur, such food practices were spoken of as low and associated with the lower unclean castes.

During my fieldwork, I never witnessed a refusal to accept food from a CRB, just as I had not seen a Chamar refusing food from a Valmiki, as they said they did.²⁰ What I did observe, was that Rani (35, Jat, F), a RB, who chaperoned me around the village, accepted water in all caste (including Chamar and Muslim) households. Also, on more than one occasion when I had gone to talk to Kalawati (CRB, 40, Kumhar), I saw Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar) there drinking tea. Jagbiri, an elderly sonless widow, lived by herself. She told me that she often ate at Kalawati’s home as at times she felt unfit to cook for herself. With regard to inter-caste relations within Barampur then, I noted some relaxation with regard to practices related to food, entry into upper caste houses, access to common village spaces and so on. Other village studies have also been pointing to a decline in such exclusionary practices (Jodhka 2002; Mayer 1996).

Based on the discussion so far, I contend that the refusal to accept food from CRBs does not appear to be about actual concerns with maintaining caste purity. This is also supported by my findings that CRBs were not excluded from common ritual spaces (such as village temples) or ritual occasions (such as weddings) that have implications for caste purity. Rather, food, as also the refusal to marry the children of CRBs (as I discuss in 8.4.2), was thus used in the process to mark distinction and maintain social hierarchies.

8.4. Children of CRM: Discrimination?

In this section, I begin by discussing if the children of CRBs face discrimination within the context of their day-to-day lives. I then move on to focus specifically on the caste status of children of inter-caste CRM and their marriage prospects. In her study of Bangladeshi brides in eastern UP, Blanchet (2008) found that the “low rank” of the “purchased wife” was passed on to their children (2008: 167). Kukreja and

²⁰ In his work on Dalit castes in a South Indian village, Deliege noted that the separation between castes was expressed through “various idioms of caste hierarchy (diet, purity and occupation)” (1992: 163). He observed how Pallars in the village claimed that they did not accept food or water from the Paraiyars, even though this was not the case. Deliege argues that in this way a Pallar attempted to claim superiority, even though in his day-to-day life ritual pollution was not much of a concern.

Kumar point out that the children of CRBs were called “*Bihārīs*”, “*Bihāran ke*” or as “*Paro kā/kī*” [a child of a woman who is an outsider] and were “burdened with the stigma of their mothers belonging to lower castes” (2013: 44-46). In her work in Haryana, Mukherjee, noted that the commonly held perception was that children of CRBs would “suffer from lack of social skills and cultural training and would become petty thieves or rogues” who would ultimately bring shame to the “culture of Haryana” (2013: 50).

Unlike these scholars, however, Kaur (2012) argues that the children of CRBs did not face any discrimination, based on her work on Bengali and Bangladeshi brides in eastern UP. In the everyday context of village life, they were treated on par with the children of UP brides. In Barampur, with a few exceptions, CRBs said that their children had never faced any discrimination. Sudeshna (23, Kumhar, F), a RB and the daughter-in-law of a CRB, told me: “Children only face discrimination if a woman brings them from her native state and they are from a previous marriage. Then people say *Bihārī ke bache* [children of a *Bihārī* man]” (1 August 2013). Babli (19, Chamar, F), the daughter of a CRB told me, however, that when there was a fight with other young women, she was told that her mother is a *mol kī Bihāran* [a bought wife from Bihar]. Similarly, Lakshmi (CRB, late 40s, Kumhar) said the name-calling extended to the children. Pramod (21, Kumhar, M), her son, told me that as a school-going child it made no difference that his mother was from “Bangladesh”. Lakshmi’s CR status, however, did cause problems for Pramod’s brother’s marriage and Pramod anticipated that problems would arise in future when he himself had to be married (see 8.4.2).

8.4.1. The Caste Status of Children of Inter-caste CRM

The question of the caste status of children of inter-caste unions has been addressed in writings on caste. Dube explained that paternity is essential for group placement in patrilineal societies. The process of biological reproduction is expressed by the metaphorical use of the terms “seed” and “earth” or “field”. The man is said to provide the “seed”, the woman the “field”. The “seed” is of essence. The child’s identity for placement within a kinship group is derived from its father (1986: 22). Elsewhere, she argues, however, that although birth follows the principle of

patrilineal descent in recruitment to the caste group, in the attribution of caste status to the child, the caste of the mother is not entirely irrelevant. Thus, irrespective of the system of descent, “caste functions as a principle of bilateral affiliation” (2003: 233). Similarly, Yalman argues that caste blood as well as caste affiliation is always bilateral even in unilineal descent systems. One parent can never “place” a child in the caste hierarchy independently; the child’s position is always crucially dependent upon the status of the other parent (1963: 40).

Tambiah (1973) argued that “sanctioned and institutionalised” hypergamous unions (involving men with women of slightly lower status) pose no problems with regard to the placement of children of these “mixed unions”. In such cases, the children retain the higher status of the father. Problems arise in the placement of children born of “unsanctioned hypergamous mixed unions” (a woman with a man of lower status which is hypogamous, or hypergamous in direction yet unacceptable, e.g., unions of partners of highly disparate status such as between a higher caste man and a woman of a lower/polluting caste). If a woman married a man of lower status, her children do not enjoy her status, but are assigned to the inferior status of her husband (1973: 221-22). Dumont (1980), like Tambiah, points out that hypergamy is permitted only within certain limits, i.e., between groups not too far separated in status. He argued that where the status difference between the two forming the alliance is too large, children of these unions form new castes/subcastes.

Does the placement of children of inter-caste unions emerge as a contentious issue within village contexts? Do they form new sub-castes or are they unproblematically placed in the caste of one parent? Writing on inter-caste (regional) marriages in Punjab-Haryana during the colonial period, Chowdhry (2007) notes that the caste of the man carried sufficient legitimacy and weight. The children born of a Chuhra or Chamar (Dalit) woman accepted in marriage by a Jat man were called Jats, even though they were often ridiculed as children of Chuhra or Chamar mothers. For the Kangra (Himachal Pradesh, north India) Rajputs, Parry noted that due to a “patrilineal bias”, the child of an inter-caste union was admitted to the caste of the father (1979: 131). In Barampur, when I enquired about the caste status of the

children of RMs involving a Lohar woman and Jat man and a Jat man and a Chamar woman, I was told that the children belonged to the caste of the father.

Studies on inter-caste/religious CRM point out that children of such marriages take on the caste/religious status of their fathers (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Blanchet 2008; Mishra 2013). In their study of CRM in Haryana, however, Kukreja and Kumar argue that the children born of such marriages are seen as a “diluted race” and not “pure *Haryānvī* or pure Jat” as “half-breeds” or “mutated” because their mothers belong to a different region and caste (2013: 44-46). Other studies on CRM in Haryana also point out that the concern regarding inter-caste CRM, among Jats in particular, is being expressed through the off-repeated phrase: “Haryana *kī nasal kharāb ho jāyegī*” (Kaur 2014: 19) or “*Haryana kī nasal badal jāgī*” [Haryana’s racial stock will go bad or change] (Chowdhry 2011: 257). The implication was that children of mothers of uncertain caste origins would compromise the purity of the caste.

In Barampur, with regard to CRM, informants were of the opinion that the caste of the mother was of no significance as far as the caste of her children was concerned. They suggested that caste is patrilineal, i.e., the children take on the caste of the father as they stated for inter-caste RM. They pointed out that if a CRB brought a child from a previous marriage in her native state, that child would belong to a different caste (his father’s) but not any of the children born in Barampur. The caste status of children of CRM, then, did not seem to be contentious, with the caste status of the father being determining. Yet discussions of the marriage of children of CRBs reveals a discourse very much in place which suggested that the mother’s (caste) status cannot be overlooked.

8.4.2. The Marriage of Children of CRBs

Ethnographic studies point to the difficulties children of (regional) inter-caste unions faced in getting married. In his study of a central Indian village in the mid-1950s, Mayer found that the child of an inter-caste union, though overtly affiliated to the caste of its “progenitor”, was thought of as a kind of “second-class member”. This became evident when his/her marriage was arranged. The child could often only with

difficulty marry a poor “full” member of the caste, and frequently ended up finding a spouse with similar mixed ancestry (1960: 25). In his study of the Jats of Meerut (UP) in the 1950s, Pradhan noted that Jat men took wives mainly of Brahmin and Muslim castes and no consideration was given to the caste of the woman, although women of untouchable or very lower castes were not taken as wives. He found that the sons of such inter-caste unions some times had to remain unmarried. The daughters were always married, but most often in poorer Jat families (1961: 132).

In Barampur, when talking about securing a “good marriage” for their children, informants mentioned the *izzat* [honour] of the potential affines as significant. An inter-caste (regional) marriage that implied self-arrangement and elopement was believed to tarnish the *izzat* of the family, and thus a child of an inter-caste union was believed to have poor marriage prospects. With regard to CRM, also inter-caste but arranged across-regions over long-distances, informants were of the opinion that problems arose in the marriage of their children even though most claimed that they did not discriminate against CRBs.

In the existing literature on CRM, this issue has not been discussed in any detail. In her study of Bangladeshi brides in eastern UP, Blanchet (2008) found that children of these marriages were married into similarly constituted families, creating a kind of sub-caste. In her study of Bengali and Bangladeshi brides in eastern UP, Kaur (2012) also draws attention to concerns regarding the future marriage prospects of children of CRM. She noted that parents in CRM felt that they would have to arrange their sons’ marriages in families of similar couples, or go back to the mother’s community to look for a match. In her earlier work, Kaur (2004) noted that the marriage prospects of daughters and sons of CRB may differ. While a daughter’s mixed-caste status may be ignored, this might become a hindrance to a son for arranging a marriage. Likewise, in their study of CRBs in Haryana, Kukreja and Kumar (2013) point out that female children did not appear to encounter difficulties in finding spouses, but that male children of CRBs would face difficulties and would have to look for wives outside the local region. In other words, this literature suggests that being the son of a CRB presents difficulties in marriage.

In her work on CRM in Haryana, however, Mishra (2013) noted that children (sons and daughters alike) of CRBs were married as per customary caste norms. They denied facing any problems because of the CR status of their mother. She argues that the problems that some children of CRBs faced, particularly sons, had to do with not having a stable source of income, low levels of education and alcoholism. She maintains that this is the case for the vast majority of young unmarried men in Haryana and had nothing to do with the caste status of the mother. In Chapter Three (Part One), I outlined the various factors that have a bearing on men's ability to marry within this rural context. I agree with Mishra's argument that the inability to meet desired criteria of eligibility may result in the failure to marry for children of CRBs and RBs alike. Unlike Mishra, though, I argue that the CR status of the mother is not the only determining factor, but it is difficult to say for certain that it is entirely inconsequential.

In Barampur, of the nineteen CRBs interviewed, nine had married children. Of the nine, four CRBs were married to Chamar men, four others to Kumhars and one CRB was married to a Muslim Lohar. None of the Jat CRBs interviewed had married children, two of whom had been in Barampur for over twenty years but were childless. I begin by describing the case of Hemlata (CRB, late 50s, Kumhar) who had four married children. I chose this case as it highlights several significant issues with regard to the marriage of children that emerged in conversations with other CRBs as well. Also, while the accounts of other informants may be just as complicated, Hemlata's case is unique in my fieldnotes because several informants contributed their viewpoints and I could generate the most detailed account of her children's marriages.

The Marriages of Hemlata's Children

Hemlata, a widow, came to Barampur from Silchar in Assam in the early 1970s. She had six children – five daughters and a son. During my fieldwork, four of her children (three daughters and a son) were already married. Her fourth daughter's marriage had been fixed. About her children's marriages, Jagbiri (RB, 71, Kumhar), Hemlata's *jethānī* [HeBW] told me: “*Kumhar ke hai aur shādī bhī Kumhar mein huyī*” [They are children of a Kumhar and they were also married to Kumhars] (28

February 2013). Hemlata talked about the time when her husband was searching for a spouse for her eldest daughter [D1], in the mid-1990s.

The custom here is for the girl's family to approach the prospective groom's family with the marriage proposal. Wherever my husband went, they would refuse saying *mā bāhar kī hai* [the mother is from outside]. I would say to my husband, 'I am from there but the children are still Kumhar'. After several difficulties we managed to get her married.

(26 February 2013)

Hemlata did not say anything more about this marriage. During a conversation about *badlā* [exchange] marriage, Munesh (RB, 38, Kumhar) revealed that she came to Barampur in the early 1990s in *badlā* for Hemlata's D1. Munesh explained:

Hemlata's daughter [D1] went from Barampur and was married in [a village] in Saharanpur district. D1's husband's sister went from Saharanpur to my *pīhar* [another village in Baghpat district] and was married to my brother and I came from my village to Barampur and married my husband [Prakash].

(22 March 2013)

Munesh said that Hemlata's CR origins had not been disclosed to D1's husband's family prior to the wedding. I talked to Prakash (Munesh's husband) to understand how he was married in *badlā* for Hemlata's D1.

Hemlata's [deceased] husband and I belong to the same *kunbā* [extended family]. I am in relation of brother to his daughters. Many families refuse to get their children married to the children of a woman who is *bāhar kī* [from outside] because they are of a different caste. Hemlata's husband agreed to give his daughter in *badlā* for me because otherwise I would have failed to find a [local] wife within the caste. I have a sister but she is much older than me and was married several years ago. A *badlā* with her was not possible. Without *badlā*, I would not have been able to marry because I am a *mazdūr* [casual labourer].

(2 April 2013)

Hemlata told me that her CR status created difficulties in the marriage of her second daughter [D2] just as it did when her eldest daughter [D1] was to be married. D2 was married to the son of a CRB. Jagbiri (Hemlata's *jethānī*) also told me about D2's marriage, explaining that this was a "contentious" marriage that had angered everyone in the *kunbā* [extended family].

My nephew [BS] left his first wife. In our caste, a second marriage is difficult unless the boy has a government job. My nephew was thus facing difficulties in getting remarried. At the time, Hemlata's daughter [D2] was of marriageable age. Those in the caste were refusing to take her daughter in marriage. I asked her to give D2 in *badlā* for my nephew. She refused and got D2 married to Shanti's [RB in Barampur, Kumhar] brother [in Haryana]. Hemlata's husband had passed away then. He would not have allowed this marriage. Shanti is in relation of *bhābhī* [BW] to D2 because Shanti's husband and Hemlata's husband belong to the same *kunbā*. This means that D2 was married to her *bhābhī*'s brother. This makes it an *āmnā-sāmnā badlā* [direct exchange]. Such marriages are not considered acceptable among the Kumhars. No one from the *kunbā* found this marriage agreeable, so Hemlata made her daughter have a court marriage [in 2002].

(27 July 2013)

Jagbiri suggests that a marriage with her “ineligible” nephew seemed to be a feasible solution for both families, as being the daughter of a CRB, D2 would fail to marry. Further, she points out that because Hemlata did not agree to this marriage, her daughter found herself in what was regarded as a “contentious” marriage – again making a statement of her non-marriageability. I talked to Shanti (RB, 24, Kumhar) whose brother was married to Hemlata's D2. Shanti told me that she was the only sister of five brothers. She was married in *badlā* for her eldest brother. Her mother, like her *sās* [HM], was a CRB from West Bengal and her *māmā* [MB] had arranged marriages in Bengal for two of her brothers. Her fourth brother was married to D2 and her youngest brother was unmarried. She added that her brother [D2's husband] could not have a *badlā* marriage and without *badlā* a marriage was not possible for him as he was a poor casual (brick-kiln) worker.

Hemlata said that she did not face difficulties in the marriage of her third daughter [D3] who was given in marriage without *badlā* in 2010. Hemlata told me that her son-in-law worked as a mechanic and was less educated than her daughter. He did not have a sister so he could not have a *badlā* marriage. Munesh told me about Hemlata's sons-in-law: “They are men who could not get married because they were not *kāmyāb* [successful] so it is obvious that they would take whatever they could get” (22 March 2013).

Hemlata's son (20, Kumhar) had a class 10 education. He migrated out for work on a contractual basis as a decorator at weddings during the wedding season. He got

married in 2011 in *badlā* for his younger sister [D4] who was to get married a few months after I completed fieldwork in August 2013. Hemlata's daughter-in-law, Madhu (18, Kumhar) was illiterate. Madhu's mother, unlike Hemlata, was a RB. Madhu's natal kin were brick-kiln workers. Hemlata told me: "If Madhu had not come here in *badlā*, no one would marry her brother. He is an alcoholic and so is her father" (26 February 2013).

In Barampur, the children of all CRBs were married within their fathers' castes. Across castes, the commonly held opinion was that difficulties arose in the marriage of sons of CRBs but not daughters. This is a context where demographic factors and livelihood concerns had a bearing on men's ability to marry and the CR status of a man's mother constituted an additional disadvantage. Unlike sons, daughters would find it easier to marry as they were not expected to be breadwinners and fulfil criteria of education and employment that men had to meet to marry within this context of masculine sex ratios and bride shortages (see Chapter Three, Part One). In this regard, Prakash (early 40s, Kumhar, M) told me: "For a son, they will say *yeh toh Banglā-dēsh wālī kā* [he is the son of a *Banglādes̄hī* woman] but few will refuse to marry the daughter of a *Banglādes̄hī* woman. The thinking is, *yeh toh birādarī kī bēṭī hai*" [she is the daughter of the caste community] (2 April 2013). The different marriage prospects of sons and daughters of CRBs could additionally be explained in terms of caste status being patrilineal. For a daughter, the caste status of her mother may be less relevant, as she belongs to her husband's caste once married.

Hemlata's case suggests, however, that her CR status was the reason for the difficulties she confronted in marrying her older two daughters. Of the nine CRBs with married daughters, only one other CRB, Faiza, said that her CR status presented difficulties in the marriage of her daughter. This raises the question of whether the difficulties faced can in fact be explained by the mother's CR status. Abdul (30, Lohar, M) belonged to Faiza's husband's *kunbā*. He told me about her daughter's marriage:

These kinds of marriages [CR] are considered *nēchī* [lower] because the woman is a *Bihāran*...Her elder daughter is married to a man *jiskā kuch rozgār nahī* [has no source of income] and he was married previously. Problems will also arise in the marriage of her other daughters because only

god knows whether she is Multani, Dhobi or Faqir [Muslim castes]. No one knows what her caste is.

(10 May 2013)

Among Muslims, unlike the Hindu castes, getting married in the first instance was not difficult, but trying to enter a secondary union presented difficulties (see 3.5). Abdul explains the refusal to accept the children of CRBs in marriage in terms of a difference of caste, as did other (caste) informants. Further, he makes a statement about the ineligibility (poor and a previous marriage) of Faiza's son-in-law, as did Munesh when she talked about Hemlata's son-in-laws, "they would take whatever they could get". This was an opinion shared by several informants across castes. Vinod (33, Chamar, M) was Devanti's (CRB, early 40s, Chamar) husband's nephew (eBS). He told me about Devanti's elder daughter's marriage.

They got their daughter married at the age of 14-15 years. The boy was twice her daughter's age. They were working at a brick-kiln in Haryana. My *chāchā* [Devanti's husband] owed the brick-kiln owner money at the end of the season. They got their daughter married to this man [also a Chamar] who was working at the same kiln. This man then paid the money that my *chāchā* owed to the brick-kiln owner.

(13 October 2012)

Vinod stressed that the older age and employment in brick-kiln work contributed to Devanti's son-in-law's ineligibility and that, owing to this ineligibility, he had to make a payment to be able to marry. In this case, money had been paid by the groom to the bride's family instead of dowry, as was the accepted practice in Barampur. Whilst, this was Vinod's response to my question about the marriage of children of CRBs, it is essential to note here that this kind of marriage (involving payment by the groom's family) may have more to do with compulsions of poverty and brick-kiln work than the CR status of the mother. It was also rumoured that there were instances where husbands of RBs had accepted a payment from the groom's family to get their daughters married to "ineligible" brick-kiln workers (see 2.4.2 and 3.3.1).

Satender (55, Chamar, M) told me: "If a man has a *naukrī* [a regular job], then his parents will say, we will not take the daughter of a *Bihāran*" (25 February 2013). A month later he said: "If a man is *kāmyāb* [successful], he will not marry the daughter

of a brick-kiln worker” (31 March 2013). Satender explained that a brick-kiln worker would not aspire to secure a man who was *kāmyāb* as a groom for his daughter, as it would mean providing a big dowry. Yet attempts were made to give daughters to families that did not work in the brick-kilns. Satender (a brick-kiln worker married to a RB) had managed to secure a non-brick-kiln worker as a groom for his daughter, as had several other Chamar informants.

What was common to all CRBs, was that their daughters were married to poor casual labourers (brick-kiln workers) with low levels of education and some (like Faiza’s and Devanti’s son-in-laws) were additionally disadvantaged by their older age or previous marriage. The daughters of two had married “down”, as their fathers were not brick-kiln workers but they were married to brick-kiln workers. Of the two cases, for one it was difficult to ascertain whether the mother’s CR status had been disclosed to her daughter’s in-laws, as contradictory accounts emerged in conversation with her, her husband and daughter-in-law. The other CRB said that the only reason they agreed to a marriage with a brick-kiln worker was because they had been “deceived” with regard to the groom’s age and employment. Thus, it is difficult to say whether having to marry (their daughters) “down” was linked to their CR status.

Men who had married the daughters of CRBs had in fact negotiated a better marriage for themselves, as the alternatives for such “ineligible” men would have been a CRM, bachelorhood or making a payment to the bride’s parents. They were married to women in accordance with caste and community norms with a dowry. Yet what was always stressed by informants was the ineligibility of the sons-in-law of CRBs. This was not done for the sons-in-law of RBs who were similarly disadvantaged. A similar argument about the ineligibility was made by informants when they talked about the marriage of sons of CRBs. Satender (55, Chamar, M) told me:

The sons of a woman who is *bāhar kī* will get married but only into *chōte level kā parivār* [families of lower status]. Those from a good family will not agree to give their daughter to the son of a *Bihāran*. Their *bahūs* [daughters-in-law] will come from poor families and will be illiterate. Sheela’s [CRB, Chamar] *bahū* is illiterate and so is Omvati’s [CRB, Chamar].

(25 February 2013)

Interestingly, neither Sheela's nor Omvati's *bahū* was illiterate; both had a class eight education. Both told me, as did the *bahū* of a third Chamar CRB, that the CR status of their *sās* had not been disclosed to their families prior to the wedding. What was common to these three RB *bahūs*, who were married to sons of CRBs, was that they all came from brick-kiln families and were married to men who were employed as a transporter, a barber or a tailor. They had then married up. Two of the three RB *bahūs* told me that if their families had known about the CR status of their *sās*, they would not have agreed to the marriage. There was no way to establish whether the CR status of their *sās* had in fact been hidden from their families or their families had prioritised the employment and relative eligibility of their prospective husbands and overlooked the CR status of their mothers.

When talking about sons of CRBs, Munesh (RB, 38, Kumar), remarked: "Why would I give my daughter to a man whose mother is *bāhar kī*? If I do, those in the caste will say, when his mother is from Bangla-desh, then how did you get your daughter married there? Are you also from Bangla-desh?" (22 March 2013). It was interesting that Munesh held this opinion, as she herself had come to Barampur in *badlā* for Hemlata's daughter. Despite her suggestion that a RB would not give her daughter in marriage to the son of a CRB, there were CRBs like Hemlata for whom this was the case. Hemlata indicated that her *bahū* (daughter of a RB) had been given in *badlā* so that her *bahū*'s brother, an alcoholic, could get married. Similarly, Sudeshna (23, Kumhar), was the daughter of a RB yet the *bahū* of a CRB. She told me about her marriage:

My brother's first wife died when he was only 26-27 years old. Without *badlā* he would not have been able to get remarried. This [being a widower] becomes a defect then. I was only 12 at the time. I came to Barampur at *gaunā* [cohabitation] when I turned 15. If my brother had not lost his wife, I would not have been married here. My *māmā* [MB] did not want me to get married here because my *sās* is *bāhār kī*. You do not know what the caste of such women is. My *māmā* also felt that my husband was not a match for me because he is dark-skinned and looked much older than me. Yet they got me married here, so that my brother could get remarried. My relatives said at least the boy is Kumhar that she [HM] did not bring him from Bengal.

(1 August 2013)

This case suggests that Sudeshna's husband's mother's CR status was offset by her brother's widowhood/previous marriage within a system of *badlā* marriage. I asked Sudeshna about what kind of marriage her family would have negotiated for her if her brother was not widowed. She said that she would still be in a *badlā* marriage, given that her natal kin are poor, but she would not be married to the son of a CRB. In the narrative above, she also mentions her husband's dark skin and that he looked much older but she stressed the CR status of his mother to explain the compromise she had to make. Several reasons can be identified for the difficulties that sons of CRBs confronted in getting married and these cannot be limited to the CR status of the mother but include the desired criteria of eligibility.

Some children of CR couples, like one of Hemlata's daughters, were married into similarly constituted families, as noted by Blanchet (2008) in her study. Shanti's (RB, 24, Kumhar) mother, like her *sās*, was a CRB. She said that marrying her into a family of a CRB was a conscious choice on the part of her parents. She added:

My mother was concerned that if my *sās* was *yāhā kī* [from here – a RB] she would have taunted me saying my mother did not teach me *yāhā ke ritī rivāj* [customs and rituals of Barampur]. One of my *nanad's sās* [HZHM] is also *bāhar kī* but my other *nanad's sās* is *yāhā kī* [local, a RB]. This *nanad's sas* [RB] taunts my *nanad* about her mother being *bāhar kī*.

(1 August 2013)

There were others like Faiza (CRB, late 40s, Lohar) who suggested that there was no option other than marrying her sons into a similarly constituted family. She explained that one of her sisters also came as a CRB to another village in Baghpat. She got her two sons married to her sister's daughters.

I had to get my sister's daughters as brides for my sons because I am from Bihar. No one would give their daughters in marriage here. Proposals would come for my son. They would say they liked my sons. Then they would ask, 'where is the mother from?' My husband would say, 'from there'. They never came back.

(21 March 2013)

Faiza saw her CR status as the reason for the inability of her sons to marry. She got her sons married to her sister's daughters because of this, although close-kin marriage was not uncommon among Muslims in Barampur (see 2.1). Kamlesh's (RB,

late 20s, Kumhar) *sās* was a CRB. Her *jeth* [HeB] was also married to the daughter of a CRB, like Faiza's sons.

My *jeth* got married several years after us. He had become old. He could not get married because his mother is *bahār ki* but also because unlike my husband he is *sāwlā* [dark skinned]. He has only a class five education and is a *mazdūr* [casual labourer]. He had to have an *āmnā-sāmnā badlā* [direct exchange]. *Isko burā mānte hai* [This is considered bad]. A *badlā* should take place between three families. His sister was married to his wife's brother. Even my *jethānī's* [HeBW] mother [HeBWM] is *bāhar kī*.

(12 May 2013)

Kumhar informants were of the opinion that the CR status of the mother was irrelevant if there was a *badlā* to give. In the above case, however, Kamlesh's *jeth* failed to have a "proper" *badlā* marriage even though he had a sister, and he had to resort to a form of *badlā* considered unacceptable among the Kumhars. Here several factors: low levels of education, casual work, dark skin and older age appear to be entangled with the CR status of the mother to make marriage difficult. Brijpal (55, Chamar, M), husband of a CRB explained that if he did not have a daughter to give in *badlā* for his son, his son would suffer from a "triple disadvantage" – being a *mazdūr* [brick-kiln employment], having no sister and his mother being a CRB (13 August 2013).

It is important to note that the sons of CRBs may suffer from disadvantages (low levels of education, brick-kiln work) similar to those of their fathers who had themselves failed to have a RM because of their own ineligibility. The fathers, such as Brijpal, may have been unable to provide their sons with the education and means to secure salaried employment that would have made them more eligible for marriage. It is, then crucial to bring the (class) status of husbands of CRBs into the discussion of the marriage prospects of children of such unions, not least because the sons of some CRBs had succeeded in fulfilling the desirable eligibility criteria.

Lakshmi (CRB, late 40s, Kumhar) talked about the time she was trying to get her eldest son married. She said that three families had refused to give their daughters in marriage to her son because she was a CRB and that finally he was married in *badlā* for his sister. Lakshmi's son worked as a salesperson in a village shop. He was not

kāmyāb [successful] by local standards. Thus, even if he had been the son of a RB, a marriage without *badlā* would have been difficult for him. While she believed that her CR status had created difficulties in the marriage of her older son, her account of her second son's marriage and younger son's marriage prospects seems to suggest that education and a *naukrī* [regular/salaried job] could offset the disadvantage of a CR mother. About her second son's impending marriage she told me:

My son lives in and owns a shop of mobile phones in the city. His marriage has been fixed. He will be married without *badlā*. This is because, from the perspective of the girl's family, my son is *kāmyāb* as he has a shop of his own in the city. I think my youngest son will have no trouble in getting married because he is a graduate and the chances of him getting a good job are high. If you have a *naukrī*, then it becomes irrelevant where your mother is from.

(2 April 2013)

Similarly, Meera (CRB, late 30s, Chamar) was married to a brick-kiln worker. She talked about how she was not concerned about the marriage of her oldest son (21, Chamar) as he was a graduate (one of the few among Chamar men in Barampur). During my fieldwork, he worked in a car showroom at the Delhi border and had filled in an application for recruitment to the UP Police. She told me: "My son will not marry the daughter of a brick-kiln worker because he is educated and has a private *naukrī*." (30 July 2013). She was convinced that she would be able to arrange an "*achī shādī*" [good marriage, i.e., with a dowry] for her son. Likewise, several Jat informants were of the opinion that if a man was *kāmyāb*, his mother's CR status became irrelevant. Kavita (41, Jat, F), for instance, told me about a "*Bihāran*" married among the Jats, who had died a few years before the start of my fieldwork. Her son was employed in the Police and since he had a government job, he faced no difficulty in getting married:

His wife came from an *achā naukrīwālā parīvār* [good family where the men had salaried employment]. If a Jat family is well off, they can also get the daughter of a poor Jat family in marriage. The *Bihārī* status of the mother or grandmother will then not be an issue. The only reason why the son of a *Bihārī* woman will not get married is if he is poor and unemployed and not because his mother is *Bihārī*.

(15 August 2013)

Some, like Rampal (87, Jat, M) did not share Kavita's opinion, however. He told me about the marriage of his daughter. She was highly educated having two Masters degrees and worked as a teacher. She was married at the age of 36, unusually high for a woman in a context such as this, because Rampal could not find a "*mel ka sāthī*" [suitable/well-matched spouse] for her. He told me:

I was considering a professor as a potential spouse for my daughter. The marriage had been fixed. The *bicholā* [matchmaker] did not reveal to us that the man's paternal grandmother was *Bihārī*. I found out about this from elsewhere while I was making enquiries. I then broke the engagement because his grandmother was *Bihārī*. We did not know what her caste was.

(29 July 2013)

Despite the high eligibility of the prospective groom, the refusal to marry was voiced in terms of the unknowability of caste in this case not of the mother, but the grandmother.

What emerges from these various accounts is a very complex picture where the CR origins of brides seem to be entangled with several other issues. It is thus difficult to provide definitive answers to whether when children of CRBs have to marry a cousin (among Muslims) or in *badlā* (as children of RBs do as well) or when they marry "down" or children of other CRBs, these can be read as instances of discrimination. It is not clear if the CR origins of a man's mother is the reason why he encounters difficulties in marriage, as informants say, or whether his mother's CR status is raised as an additional issue when he has failed to fulfil the desired criteria of eligibility that are crucial for the children of RBs as well.

Conclusion

In RM, inter-caste marriages are not tolerated and they may result in honour killings/violence. CRMs differ from RMs in that respect. CRBs also differ from RBs as they experience a lack of belonging because of their language, appearance and caste. The tolerance of CRM was attributed to *majbūri*, i.e., the necessity or compulsion felt by most men to marry, and *majbūri* was used as a rationale for the infringement of caste rules in marriage. Further, CRMs are tolerated as they do not threaten local power hierarchies within the village. As I have discussed in earlier

chapters, within everyday contexts, the CR status of brides is not of primary significance in decisions regarding work, having and raising children, their relationships with other women or their husbands. In this chapter, I show that CRBs are largely accorded the status of wives, mothers, daughters-in-law, and that their children are granted legitimacy and have the same rights of inheritance as children of RBs. This indicates acceptance, as also, for instance, does their inclusion on ritual occasions such as weddings or when their children marry into their father's caste. Yet I also highlight how the use of derogatory terms (*mol kī*, *Bihārī* and *pūrabnī*) serves to remind CRBs of their regional origins and that a payment had been made for them. The idiom of colour is used to accentuate difference and imply the lower caste status of CRBs. Some people in the village say that they refuse to accept food or marry the children of CRBs.

The issue of the marriage of the children of CRMs has remained a very under-researched area. On the basis of my fieldwork, I point to the difficulty of determining whether being the child of a CRB is the basis of discrimination as that status is entangled with several other issues. It is certainly spoken of as a hindrance. It is a complex matter, however, and I highlight that it is the intersection of various other forms of disadvantage that tend to make being a child of a CRB a problem. What is also significant is that the husbands of CRBs were themselves disadvantaged and that had led them to have a CRM in the first place. In most cases, this economic and other disadvantage was passed on to their sons. Thus, the non-marriageability of sons of CRBs may be (at least partially) explained by the perpetuation of inequality. The most prevalent concern appears to be uncertainty about the caste status of CRBs. I propose that this (as also the refusal to accept food from CRBs) may have little to do with actual concerns of purity but should be interpreted as being about marking difference and navigating (superior) status. While there may be a weakening in some social practices of caste, this also suggests that in rural contexts, the discourse of caste, as a way to mark distinction, is very much in place and points to a *tolerance* but not *acceptance* of CRM. At the same time, it is necessary to stress that while CRBs faced discrimination that was related to their CR origins and they differed from RBs in this respect, this discrimination did not constitute the major part of their lived

experiences. Their experiences of everyday life were shaped largely by the inequalities within which they lived their lives.

CONCLUSION

This research stemmed from my interest in interrogating the moral panic surrounding CRM through an exploration of women's post-marital experiences. Earlier studies on rural north Indian contexts have drawn attention to the constraints within which married women live their lives. The emphasis in NGO and journalistic accounts and some academic work on the low status and lack of agency of CRBs then led me to think also about the location of RBs within marriage and familial relationships. Thus, the question that this research aims to address is: How do the lived experiences of marriage of RBs compare with CRBs? I addressed this question through an ethnographic study of a village in the western part of the north Indian state of UP. CRMs are believed to date back to the early 1960s, although historical accounts suggest a longer history (see Introduction). Western UP had so far not figured in the literature as an area for research on CRM, despite persisting masculine sex ratios in the region that are understood by some studies as the primary reason why men seek brides from other states.

This research also aims to address other related questions when comparing CRBs and RBs that were informed by an understanding of the significance of factors such as stage in married life, caste/religion and class within which women lived their lives. This research, then, also highlights how inequalities shape lived experiences. In asking how, apart from regional origin, the aforementioned factors shape women's post-marital experiences, this study attempts to contribute to an understanding of arranged marriage within a north Indian rural context more generally.

The thesis is organised around three interrelated themes: (1) The factors operating at bride-sending and bride-receiving regions that result in a CRM. I ask: Why do men seek brides from other states and why do women become CRBs? (Chapter Three); (2) How are CRMs and RBs negotiated? I outline the role of matchmakers and marriage payments entailed in making a marriage and the rituals regarded as necessary to make a marriage "legitimate" (Chapters Two and Four); (3) The bulk of the thesis tackles the question of lived experiences in marriage by focusing on different aspects of RBs' and CRBs' everyday lives – what the process of adjustment in a new (marital) home means for women as they leave their natal homes to live in

their husbands' homes and villages, the work that women do, their relationships with other women in their marital villages, their relationships with their husbands and with their natal kin (Chapters Five to Seven). The research also attempts to outline issues specific to CRBs – discrimination, belonging and incorporation within a context that is (at least initially) culturally and linguistically alien to them and the status and rights and marriage of children of cross-regional couples (Chapter Eight). In this conclusion, I outline the key findings and arguments, whilst also discussing the contributions and limitations of my ethnographic study and suggesting directions for further research.

In attempting to contextualise CRM, I started by exploring why some men seek brides from other states. My findings point to the limitations of an understanding based solely on demographic factors. Masculine sex ratios are not the only reason why men bring CRBs. I demonstrate that there has been a long-term pattern of highly masculine sex ratios in the region, so the contemporary inability of some men to marry has to be explained by other factors. These include: changes in landholding patterns, livelihood strategies, and caste differences in livelihoods, education and white-collar employment that have a significant bearing on particular men's ability to marry. The necessity to marry or the challenges that men face in trying to get married are not experienced in the same way by all men, but are determined by their caste and class location as well as individual characteristics (e.g. physical disability, previous marriage etc.).

I found that men and their families adopt different strategies in response to the difficulties faced. My findings point to the existence of different forms of marriage (e.g. exchange marriage) mentioned in some earlier ethnographies as "deviant" or "aberrant". In his study of the Patidar (the dominant caste) in Gujarat (western India), Pocock, for instance, noted among some Patidars the "direct exchange of sister for sister, with bride-price where such exchange was impossible". He regarded the practices "as deviations from local norms rather than as a possibly illuminating variation" (1972: 152) (see also Minturn 1993: 63). In Barampur, exchange marriages, for instance, were not exceptional and although not regarded as ideal or

prestigious ways of marrying they had emerged as acceptable forms of marriage in response to the difficulties confronted by some men.

An issue that came to the forefront with the recent agitation (that began in July 2015) by Patels (Patidar caste) in Gujarat for OBC status was the inability of young men of the caste to marry. This has a longer history, as Pocock in his work in the early-mid 1950s noted that the number of men exceeded that of women and many men were obliged to seek brides in “inferior levels of the Patidar caste and even in inferior castes” (1972: 104). More recent accounts report the marriage of Patel men with tribal girls within Gujarat (Aravamudan 2007). Unpacking the factors that account for contemporary bachelorhood for men of the three selected Hindu castes in Barampur can shed light on other regions where the inability to marry experienced by men (particularly for those of former agrarian castes such as the Patidars) has emerged as a growing concern. What my research has not been able to address fully is why Muslim men seemingly placed in positions similar to some Hindu men in terms of engagement in casual work within a context of unfavourable sex ratios apparently do not confront difficulties in marrying within the region. What is needed is further research on contemporary Muslim marriage practices.

Other than the moral panic around the “plight” of CRBs, there is also a moral panic around a “surplus” of unmarried men, with some recent literature focusing on the (negative) implications of (involuntary) bachelorhood (see Introduction). This literature assumes that wives are a civilising influence on men. An exploration of this is beyond the scope of this thesis. I discuss elsewhere, however, that in Barampur too, the dominant (village) narrative on unemployed young men who fail to marry centred on their deviant behaviour (Chaudhry forthcoming). This violent male behaviour may have to do with the aggressive patriarchal culture of this rural context, of which the sex ratio imbalance is one outcome. What the dominant narrative offers in itself is insufficient evidence to establish a relationship between non-marriage and violent behaviour. The moral panic around unmarried “surplus males” is thus an issue that needs further academic interrogation.

Some academic literature has focused on living alone and noted its rise among older people in rural and urban areas in many parts of the world (see Jamieson and

Simpson 2013). What is significant in the Indian context, however, and an area for future research, are the implications of (involuntary) bachelorhood for care and living arrangements. In her work in Haryana, Kaur notes the contemporary marginalisation of bachelors in the rural households. She cites instances of the bachelor's brother's wife unwilling to give him (bachelor) food (2008: 113). Similar concerns were expressed by informants in Barampur who pointed to the greater problems that have arisen with respect to accommodating the unmarried into nuclear households. Unlike in western contexts, the labour intensity of women's work makes solo living difficult in rural contexts such as this. Moreover, it is regarded as shameful for men to perform what are regarded as "female tasks" (e.g. cooking, cleaning etc.). If families become unwilling to accommodate never-married men, will there be an increase in solo living? How would solo living work for men if women's contribution to paid work is essential to the sustenance of households? How would living alone work for men who need someone, usually women, to cook and clean, wash clothes etc.? Further, as the elderly are cared for by families, in the absence of alternative/institutionalised care arrangements, who will care for aging bachelors?

Much of the existing literature on CRMs has highlighted not only the particular context within which CRMs are negotiated but also the differential modes of arrangement (involving payment to a go-between) with the groom meeting the wedding expenses. This has often resulted in their categorisation as bride-buying/selling or trafficking. A look at CRM and RM alike reveals the complexity of marriage payments. Given the ideology of *kanyādān* [gift of a virgin] with dowry being the predominant form of marriage payment, any payment made by the groom to the bride's family is construed as the sale of a bride. I also show that not all CRMs can be placed in one or the other category of bride-price, trafficking or a new form of commercially-mediated marriage involving payment to a go-between.

My focus on post-marital experiences reveals that CRBs have much in common with RBs despite the different context within which CRMs are arranged, the go-betweens involved and the payments incurred by the groom. An exploration of what the process of movement from natal to marital home entails for women reveals that there are differences between CRBs' and RBs' experiences of adjustment, with the process

being more difficult for the former. For CRBs, marriage meant not only movement from *pīhar* to *sasurāl* but, additionally, learning a new language and adjusting to a way of life in a new cultural context in isolation from their natal kin. Yet a focus on other aspects of women's everyday lives after the initial period of adjustment, i.e., the work that women do and the relationships that they have with other women (within and outside their households) in their marital village reveals that their experiences are shaped by a range of factors other than their regional or CR origins.

As far as women's work is concerned, the composition of the households they live in, age/seniority, caste, poverty and widowhood are crucial. I draw attention not only to the unequal (household) division of labour between men and women but also to the importance of recognising the division of work between women in non-nuclear households that varies with the passage of time for RBs and CRBs alike. Likewise, a focus on sexual relations, marital violence and reproductive "choice" reveals that for CRBs and RBs, the lived experiences of conjugality were shaped by the unequal power relations between spouses. Through a focus on the everyday lived reality of the marital relationship, I demonstrate that the violence that women suffer is normalised, yet women may find ways to resist or endure and they may feel intimate with husbands and see support in small everyday practices of intimacy.

The support available to a married woman is an aspect I explore in detail in the thesis. Apart from the support from husbands (Chapter Six), I focus on support from other women in the marital home and village (Chapter Five) and from natal kin (Chapter Seven). I conclude that the relationships that CRBs and RBs are able to establish with other women are determined not by their regional origins but by other factors that include the structure of the household and mobility (that increases as they advance in their married lives).

RBs and CRBs, however, are different with respect to their relationships with their natal kin. I have highlighted how the tyranny of distance reduces the amount and type of support CRBs can access from their natal kin. While natal kin contact is not sought by RBs on a day-to-day basis, natal kin ties are sustained through visits that offers some respite from work and gifts that help enhance the conjugal fund and secure a woman's place in her *sasurāl* [marital/in-laws' home]. Natal kin support

becomes particularly crucial in moments of crisis as it alone offers women the possibility of refuge to recoup or of intervention to negotiate a better situation for themselves. CRBs have neither access to refuge nor intervention in situations of marital distress.

While most RBs were better placed than CRBs, I found that RBs' relative proximity to their natal kin did not necessarily guarantee natal kin support. The ability to access natal kin support may change for married women over the course of their married lives, with poverty and the death of male kin (particularly fathers) being determining. Some RBs, like CRBs, found themselves without any support. In the absence of economic independence and no alternative to marriage, the absence of natal kin support places a woman in a particularly vulnerable position and its significance thus must not be understated.

RBs may experience some sense of ambiguity with regard to belonging, as on marriage they become *parāyā* [someone else's property], until they acquire the status of matriarchs of their households. Additionally, CRBs may experience a lack of belonging because of their regional origins. This includes verbal abuse that serves to remind them that they came from elsewhere or that a payment had been made for them, derogatory remarks about their language and skin colour, and practices such as the refusal to accept food or marry their children because of their unknown caste status. Yet what I wish to emphasise is that for CRBs this discrimination did not constitute the major part of their lived experiences. As for most RBs, CRBs' experiences of their day-to-day lives were dominated by concerns of work, poverty and earning a livelihood, illness, conflicts with the *sās* [mother-in-law] or other in-married women and violence.

Moreover, while a focus on the discrimination that CRBs face highlights contrasts in RBs' and CRBs' lived experiences, the discussion of the marriage of children of CRBs (especially sons) shows that the criteria of eligibility that have to be met to be marriageable are relevant for RBs' children as well.

The implications of inter-caste CRMs for the next generation (caste status and marriage of children) have remained largely unresearched in the existing literature. In

a context where (caste) endogamy remains the norm, as it is essential to boundary maintenance, the tolerance of inter-caste CRM raises theoretical questions for further research: How much deviation from the “norm” is acceptable? What does this reveal about the flexibility of social hierarchies and stratification? Which are more resistant and which more permeable?

As outlined in the Introduction, most accounts of CRM suggest a moral panic that pays little attention to post-marital experiences. Some recent accounts, however, have explored marital experiences, but focused only on CRBs. This research departs from existing research as it addresses the moral panic through a comparison with the lived experiences of women in RMs as well. Further, a focus on women belonging to different Hindu and Muslim castes, apart from years of marriage and class, has helped to highlight variations in women’s lived experiences, particularly for women living in poverty. Through a focus on different caste groups, this study sheds light on marriage among Muslims, intermediate, Dalit and dominant castes and so contributes to the existing literature on marriage (more specifically arranged marriage) in India that has been largely dominated by a focus on Hindu upper-castes, apart from some exceptions (e.g. Grover 2011; Still 2014).

By drawing on and bringing together different conceptions of agency, I demonstrate that women (CRBs and RBs alike) are not entirely without agency. In investigating why women become CRBs, some accounts of CRM, as also on cross-border marriages, portray all women in such marriages as victims of trafficking and assume that they have no agency in (marriage) migration decisions. Looking at the context in which CRB informants in Barampur married, points to some agency within compulsion. Economic circumstances may push women to marry far away, but in the process they may secure a life with less extreme poverty. Family situations may give them little choice but to enter a CRM, but it may possibly offer escape from insecure dependence on family members. Individual characteristics such as a previous marriage or physical disability might make CRM the only option, but they have some agency in “choosing” that over their other limited options. A fuller understanding of the factors that influence decisions regarding migration over long-distances for marriage could be gained through fieldwork in the areas where CRBs originated.

This is a limitation of this research (as outlined in Chapter One), and could be an area for future research.

A focus on married women's agency, shows that women may consent, submit and endure, at times recognise and critique the inequality of the relations within which they live their lives, they may resist (often in subtle ways) and even collude or "bargain" to become part of the system that oppresses them. Crucially, however, what is significant with regard to women's ability to exercise agency was not whether they were RBs or CRBs but rather age and seniority that offered all women the possibility of eventually sharing power within their household hierarchy. As women's experiences change over the course of their married lives, this research also demonstrates that using years of marriage rather than age as a criterion in selecting respondents is more fruitful in understanding lived experiences of women at different stages of their married lives.

Through a focus on the conjugal relationship, this research also contributes to an understanding of intimacy in parentally-arranged marriage in a rural Indian context, where the basis on which relationships are entered and the possibilities for ending and leaving relationships are different not only from western contexts but also from those available to the middle-class in urban India. This ethnographic study, then, not only fills a gap in the literature on intimacy in marriage in contemporary rural India and South Asia more broadly but, by doing so, highlights the significance of recognising the specificity of socio-cultural contexts in shaping lived experiences in intimate relationships. By demonstrating the significance of everyday practices of intimacy, this research also contributes to the western discussions on the importance of "everyday ordinary moments" and "small acts of kindness" in long-term couple relationships (e.g. Brownlie 2014; Gabb and Fink 2015).

My overarching argument is that CRBs are similar in many ways to RBs with regard to how they live and experience marital relations, and that recognising their shared experiences contributes to an understanding of the gendering of intimate relationships in rural India. The realities of the everyday marital experiences of all the women researched are better served by this approach, than by contrasting CRMs against supposedly "normal" RMs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One: Village Survey

Serial Number:

Date:

1. Name of Household Head:

2. Religion:

3. Caste:

4. *Gotrā*:

5. How many members of this HH migrate out of the village for (including daily commuters)?

Employment		Education		Permanent Migrants	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female

6. Details of Household members:

Relation to HH Head	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation (in words)		Marital Status*	Income									
				At Source	At Migration Destination		From Occupation at Source			From Migration			Rent			
							D	W	M	D	W	M	D	W	M	
1.HH Head																
2																
3																
4																
5																
6																
7																
8																
9																
10																

*M-Married; NM-Not/Never Married, D-Divorced, W-Widowed, S-Separated

7. Nature of Household:

Joint

☐

Nuclear

☐

8. Marriage Details of Couples in the HH and Previously Married:

Relation to HH Head	Age at Marriage		Current age of bride	Do bride and groom belong to the same: (yes-Y; No-N)						Marriage distance (Km)	Are both bride and groom from rural areas? (Yes-Y; No-N)	*Who conducted the marriage?	**Who arranged the marriage?
	Bride	Groom		Caste	Religion	Gotra	Village	District	State				
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													

9. Marriage Details of Out-married Sisters/Daughters of the HH:

Relation to HH Head	Age at marriage		Current age of Bride	Do bride and groom belong to the same: (yes-Y; No-N)						Marriage distance (Km)	Are both bride and groom from rural areas? (yes-Y; No-N)	*Who conducted the marriage?	**Who arranged the marriage?
	Bride	Groom		Caste	Religion	Gotra	Village	District	State				
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													

* **(A)** Brahman Priest; **(B)** Other (Specify)

****(A)** Parents/Siblings/Spouse of Sibling; **(B)** Extended Family members; **(C)** caste members; **(D)** Payment to individual middlemen/women **(E)** Marriage Bureau; **(F)** Print/other advertisement; **(G)** Others (specify)

10. Property/Assets:**(A) House:**

Own		Rented		<i>Kuccha</i>		<i>Pucca</i>		<i>Kuccha-Pucca</i> mixed	
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(B) Agricultural land		(C) Cattle	(D) Other
<i>Bigha</i>	Acres		

Who works on the land?

Family Members					Hired labour
HH Head	Wife	Son(s)	Daughter(s)	Other Relations	

Cattle work:

Family Members					Hired labour
HH Head	Wife	Son(s)	Daughter(s)	Other Relations	

Notes:

Appendix Two: Details of CRB and RB informants

RB				CRB			
	Name	Age	Caste (Hindu)		Name	Age	Caste (Hindu)
1	Koyal	16	Chamar	1	Kanchan	21	Chamar
2	Abha	25	Chamar	2	Samita	Early 30s	Chamar
3	Aarti	27	Chamar	3	Renuka	33	Chamar
4	Kusum	47	Chamar	4	Mansi	33	Chamar
5	Jagmati	Early 60s	Chamar	5	Meera	Late 30s	Chamar
				6	Radha	Early 40s	Chamar
				7	Devanti	Early 40s	Chamar
				8	Sheela	Early 40s	Chamar
				9	Maya	Mid 40s	Chamar
6	Ritu	25	Jat	10	Savita	Late 20s	Jat
7	Urmila	32	Jat	11	Varsha	28	Jat
8	Kajri	35	Jat	12	Pushpa	Late 30s	Jat
9	Sarla	47	Jat	13	Jaya	45	Jat
10	Kripa	75	Jat				
11	Shanti	24	Kumhar	14	Kalawati	40	Kumhar
12	Kamlesh	Late 20s	Kumhar	15	Lakshmi	Late 40s	Kumhar
13	Munesh	38	Kumhar	16	Chhaya	55	Kumhar
14	Jagbiri	71	Kumhar	17	Hemlata	Late 50s	Kumhar
			Muslim				Muslim
15	Sakeena	43	Teli	18	Jameela	21	Teli
16	Khalida	45	Teli				
17	Nasira	26	Lohar	19	Faiza	Late 40s	Lohar
18	Muneera	32	Lohar				
19	Shazia	Early 70s	Lohar				

Details of Informants (Structured Interviews)

	Name	Sex	Age	Caste	Religion	Occupation	Other Information
1	Saroj	F	35	Jat	Hindu	<i>Āshā</i> worker	
2	Kavita	F	41	Jat	Hindu	<i>Ānganwādī</i> worker	
3	Shakuntala	F	37	Jat	Hindu	Housewife	Postgraduate
4	Rampal	M	87	Jat	Hindu	Retired college teacher	Younger brother is a never-married man
5	Mahipal	M	67	Jat	Hindu	Retired Army man	His three sons are government employees
6	Amarpal	M	65	Jat	Hindu	Farmer	Never-married man
7	Ashok	M	39	Jat	Hindu	Life Insurance Agent	
8	Vedpal	M	63	Jat	Hindu	Village school teacher	Daughter-in-law is a CRB
9	Harpal	M	70	Jat	Hindu	Village school teacher	
10	Brijpal	M	78	Jat	Hindu	Retired college teacher	
11	Satender	M	55	Chamar	Hindu	Brick-kiln worker	His adult son was facing difficulties in finding a wife
12	Ratanpal	M	55	Chamar	Hindu	Farmer	Husband of CRB 9
13	Ajay	M	24	Chamar	Hindu	Brick-kiln worker	Was facing difficulty in finding a wife
14	Ratan	M	22	Chamar	Hindu	Brick-kiln worker	Husband of CRB 1
15	Dharmo Devi	F	70	Chamar	Hindu	Brick-kin worker	Mother-in-law of CRB
16	Babli	F	19	Chamar	Hindu	Student	Daughter of CRB 8

17	Ramesh	M	50	Kumhar	Hindu	Potter, Brick-kiln worker	Husband of CRB
18	Virender	M	52	Kumhar	Hindu	Shopkeeper	Never-married man
19	Ompal	M	55	Kumhar	Hindu	Potter, Vegetable seller	Husband of CRB 14
20	Prakash	M	Early 40s	Kumhar	Hindu	Brick-kiln worker	Husband of NB 13 Was married in exchange for the daughter of CRB 17
21	Vivek	M	26	Kumhar	Hindu	Journalist	Father's elder brother is a never- married man and his own elder brother is married to a CRB
22	Deepa	F	Early 30s	Kumhar	Hindu	CRB	Acted as go- between for several marriages
23	Sudeshna	F	23	Kumhar	Hindu	Housewife	Daughter-in-law of CRB 16
24	Abdul	M	30	Lohar	Muslim	Factory worker	His father's brother's son is married to CRB 19
25	Yusuf	M	77	Lohar	Muslim	Blacksmith	

Appendix Three: Marriage Distance: RB and CRB Informants

	RB	District	State	Marriage Distance (Kms)
	Name			
1	Koyal	Muzaffarnagar	UP	50
2	Abha	Meerut	UP	41
3	Aarti	Baghpat	UP	12
4	Kusum	Muzaffarnagar	UP	23
5	Jagmati	Muzaffarnagar	UP	65
6	Ritu	Baghpat	UP	40
7	Urmila	Baghpat	UP	10
8	Kajri	Muzaffarnagar	UP	60
9	Sarla	Baghpat	UP	25
10	Kripa	Shamli	UP	37
11	Shanti	Muzaffarnagar	UP	70
12	Kamlesh	Muzaffarnagar	UP	65
13	Munesh	Baghpat	UP	24
14	Jagbiri	Muzaffarnagar	UP	40
15	Sakeena	Baghpat	UP	20
16	Khalida	Shamli	UP	32
17	Nasira	Baghpat	UP	12
18	Muneera	Saharanpur	UP	103
19	Shazia	Saharanpur	UP	105

Marriage Distance: CRB Informants

	CRB			
	Name	District	State	Marriage Distance (appx.)
1	Kanchan	Madhepura	Bihar	1200
2	Samita	Malda	West Bengal	1400
3	Renuka	Sahibganj	Jharkhand	1200
4	Mansi	Giridih	Jharkhand	1400
5	Meera	Pakur	Jharkhand	1200
6	Radha	Giridih	Jharkhand	1500
7	Devanti	Giridih	Jharkhand	1053
8	Sheela	Nasik	Maharashtra	1300
9	Maya	South Dinajpur	West Bengal	1400
10	Savita	Hazaribagh	Jharkhand	1160
11	Varsha	Jalpaiguri	West Bengal	1500
12	Pushpa	Madhubani	Bihar	1100
13	Jaya	Mednipur	West Bengal	1400
14	Kalawati	Cachar	Assam	Over 2000
15	Lakshmi	Mednipur	West Bengal	1400
16	Chhaya	Mednipur	West Bengal	1400
17	Hemlata	Cachar	Assam	Over 2000
18	Jameela	Godda	Jharkhand	1400
19	Faiza	Giridih	Jharkhand	1053